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(54) **PEER-TO-PEER EMAIL WITH VIDEO AND ADVERTISING ASPECTS**

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See application file for complete search history.

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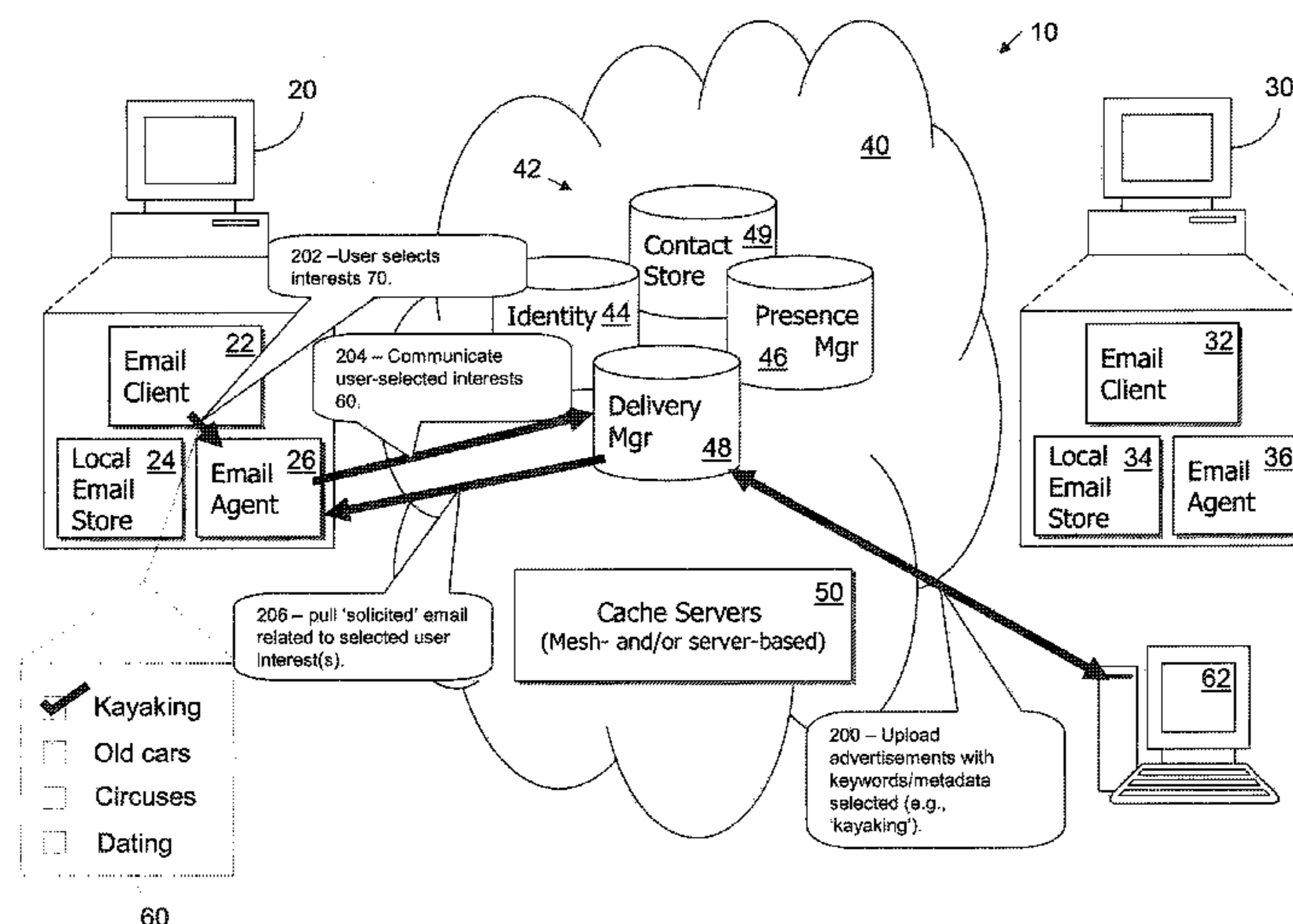
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A Peer-to-Peer (“P2P”) email and social networking system for use by plural users to exchange emails and attachments includes a mesh network that includes plural node computers, each running a P2P email client, and each constructed to transmit and receive emails. The emails are stored in mailboxes residing on each node computer, and may be encrypted during transmission, and may remain encrypted while stored at each node computer.

18 Claims, 16 Drawing Sheets



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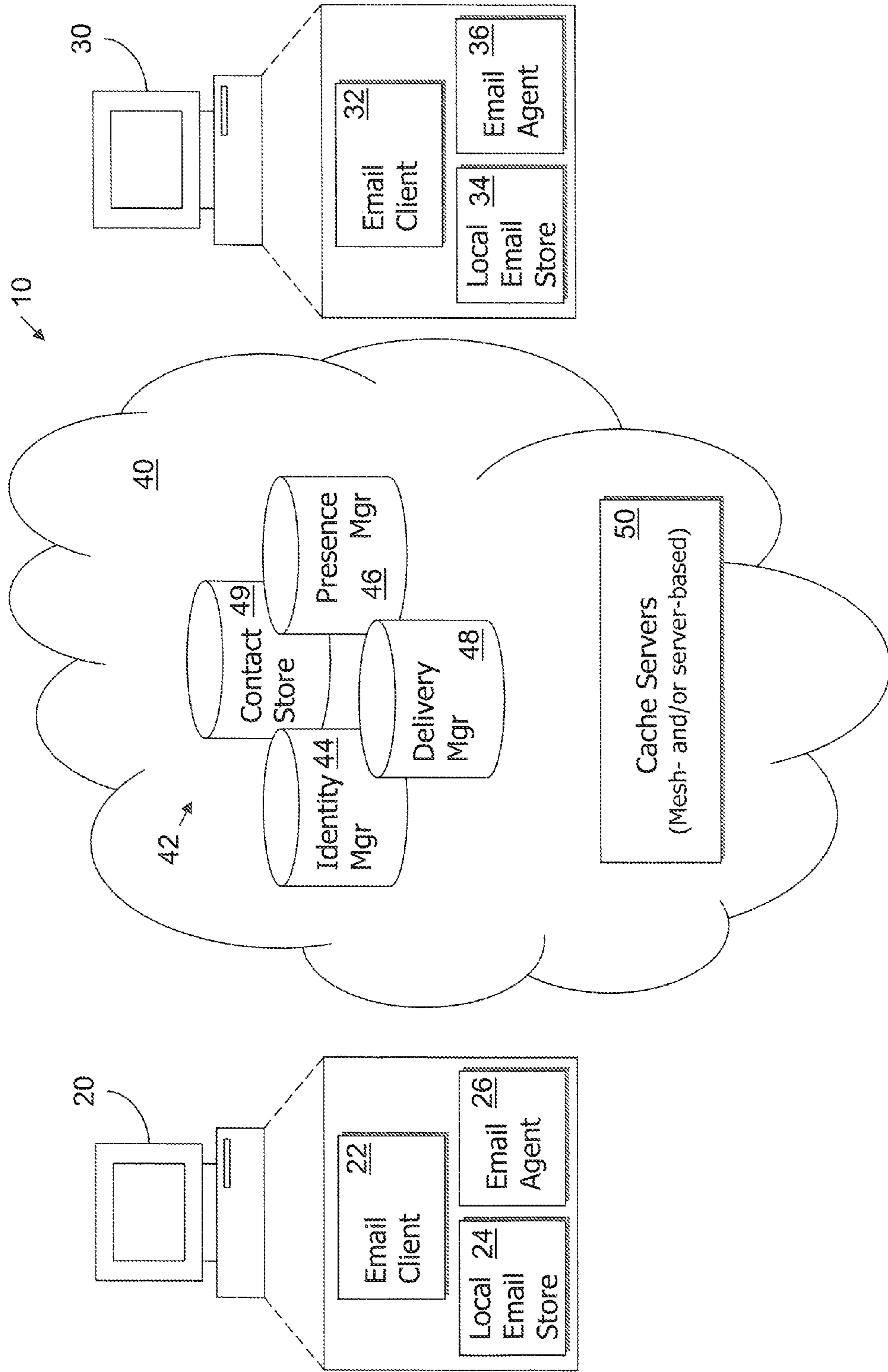


Fig. 1

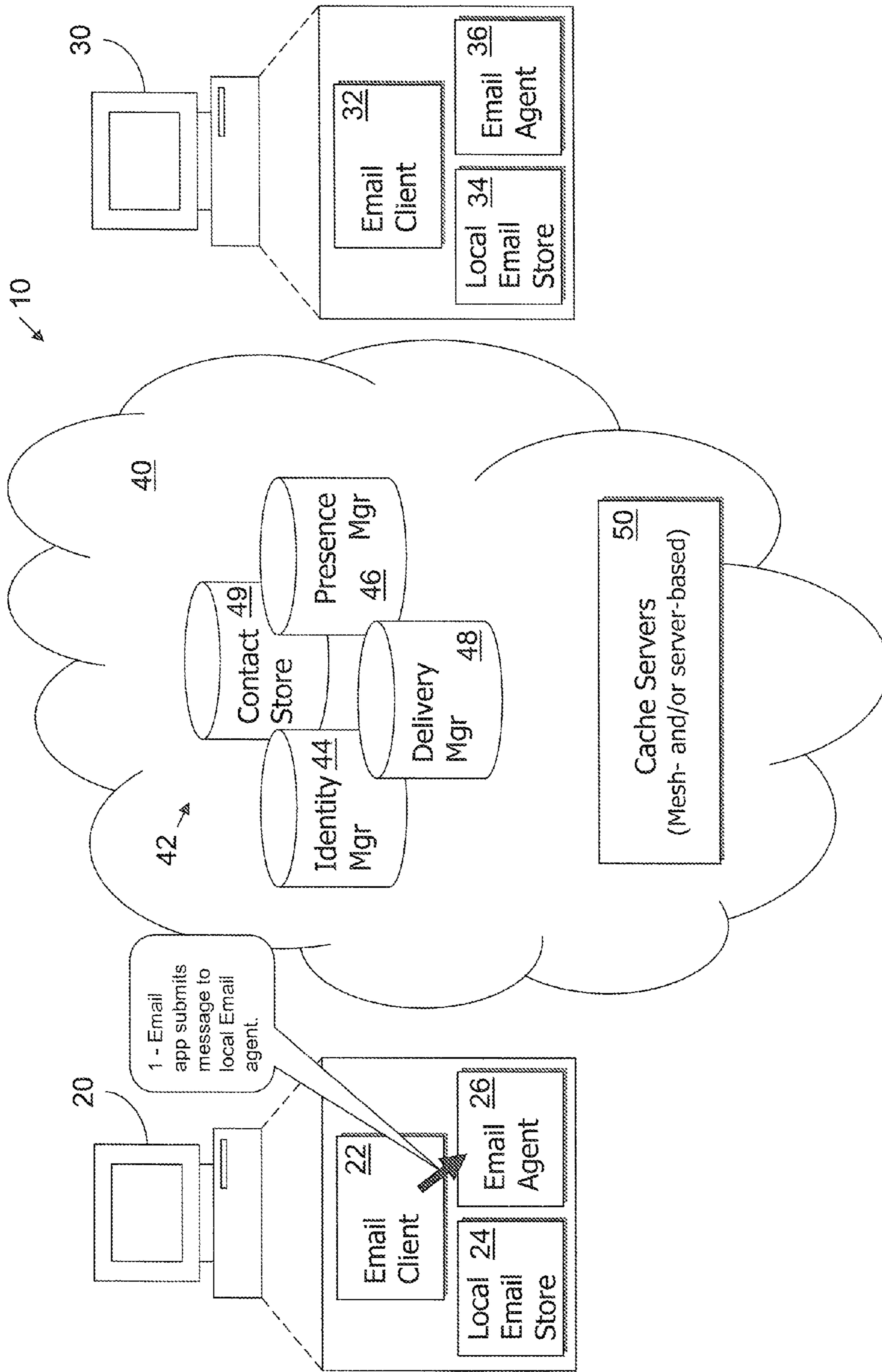


Fig. 2A

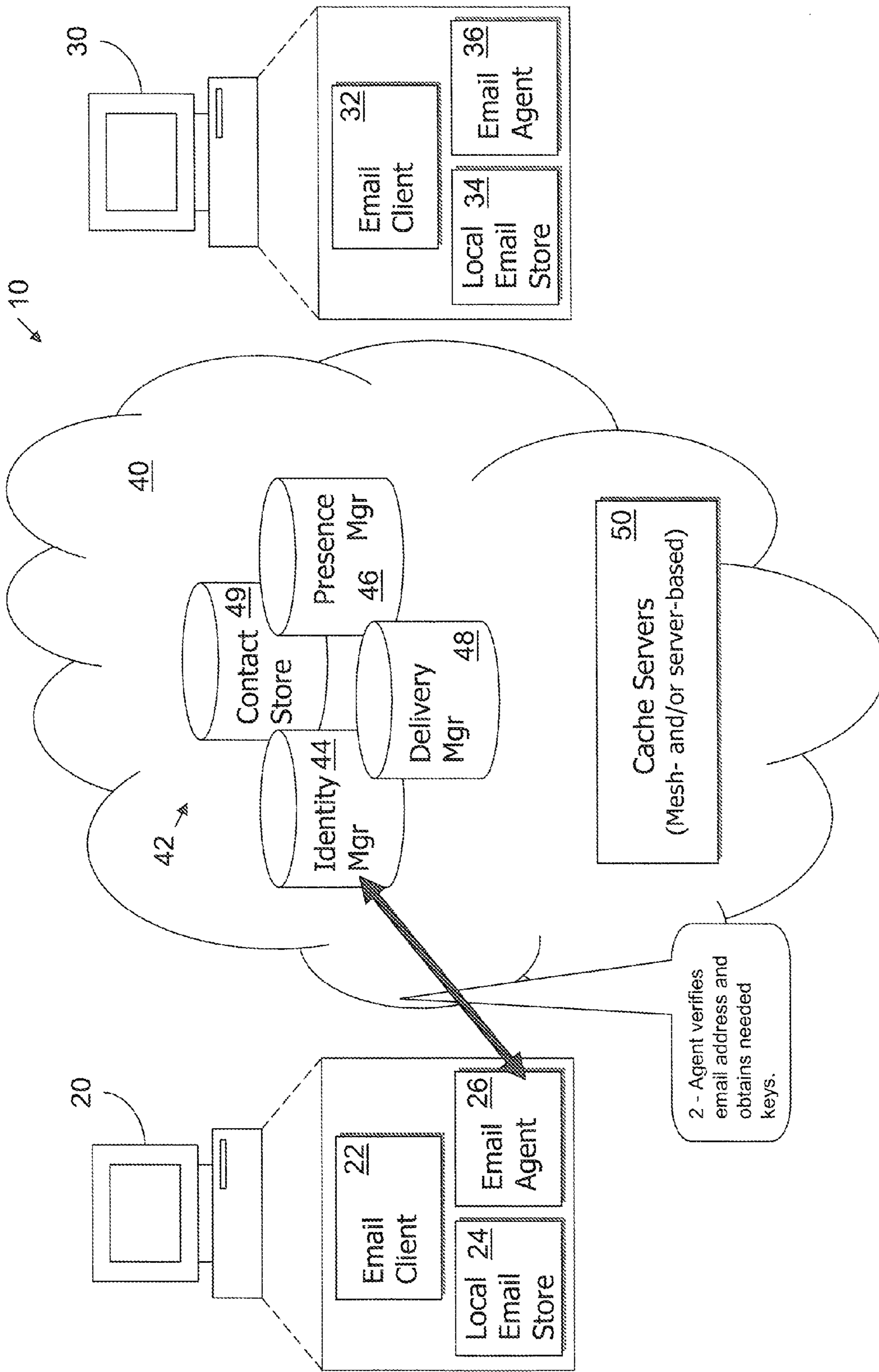


Fig. 2B

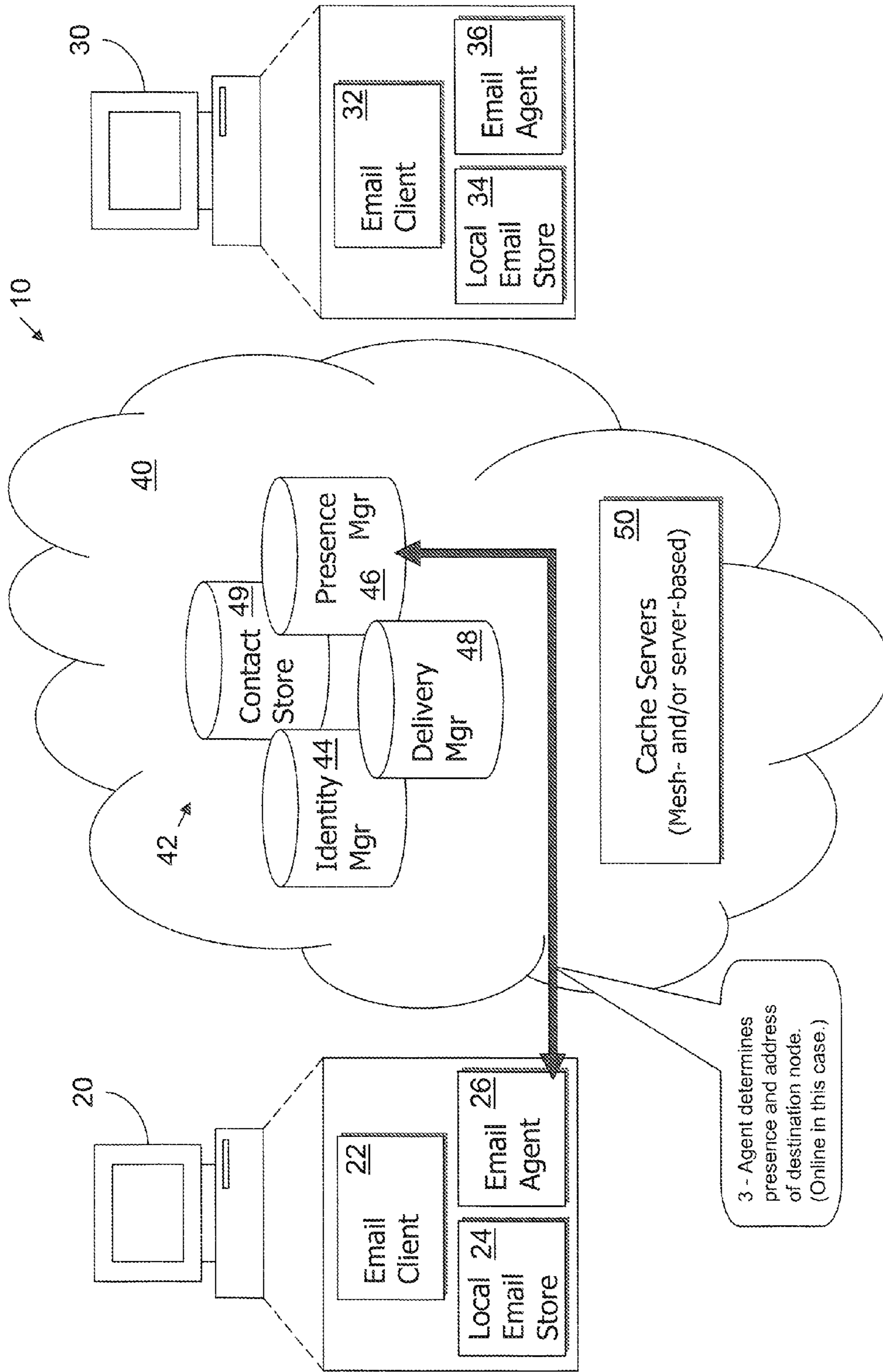


Fig. 2C

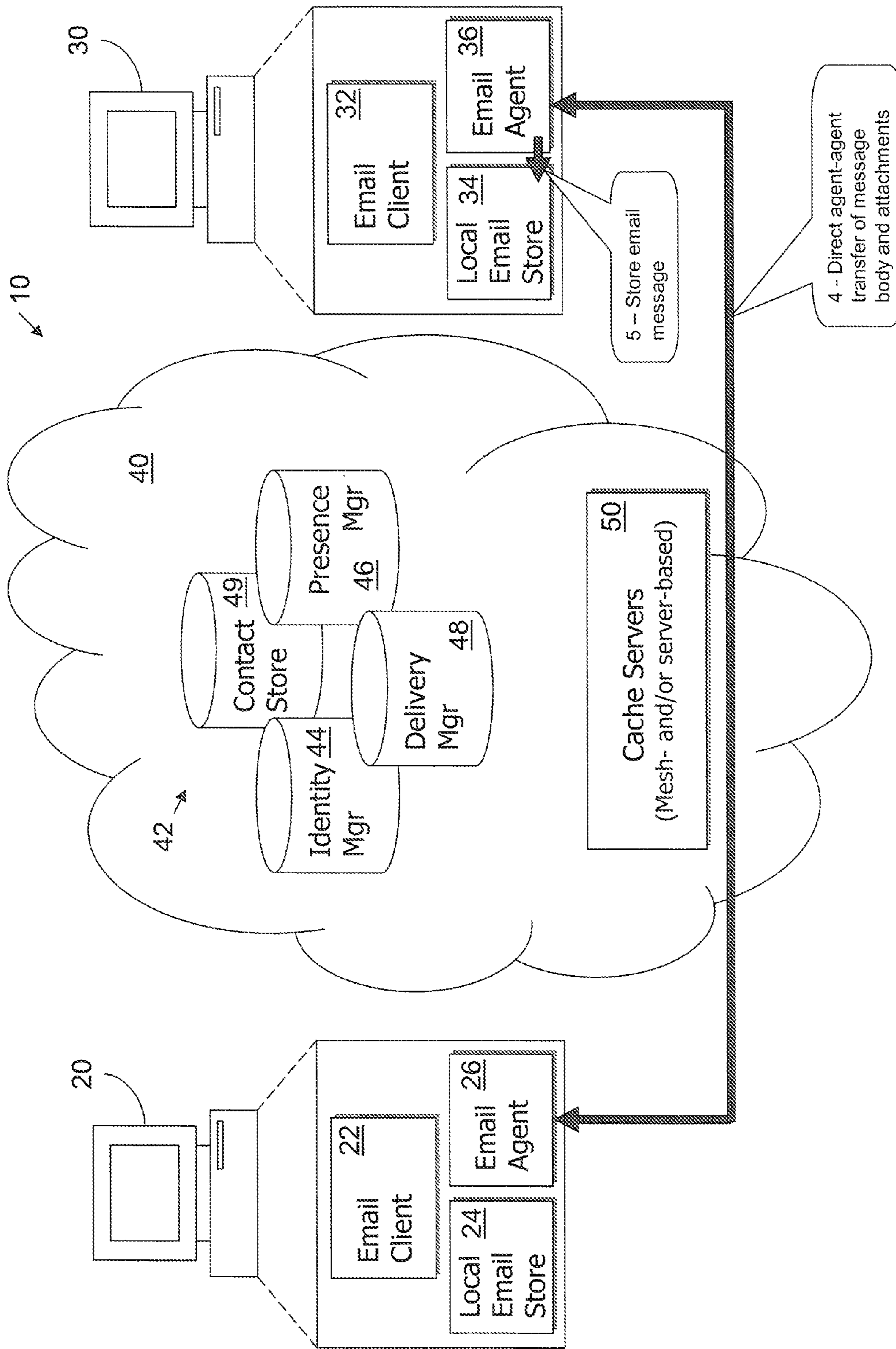


Fig. 2D

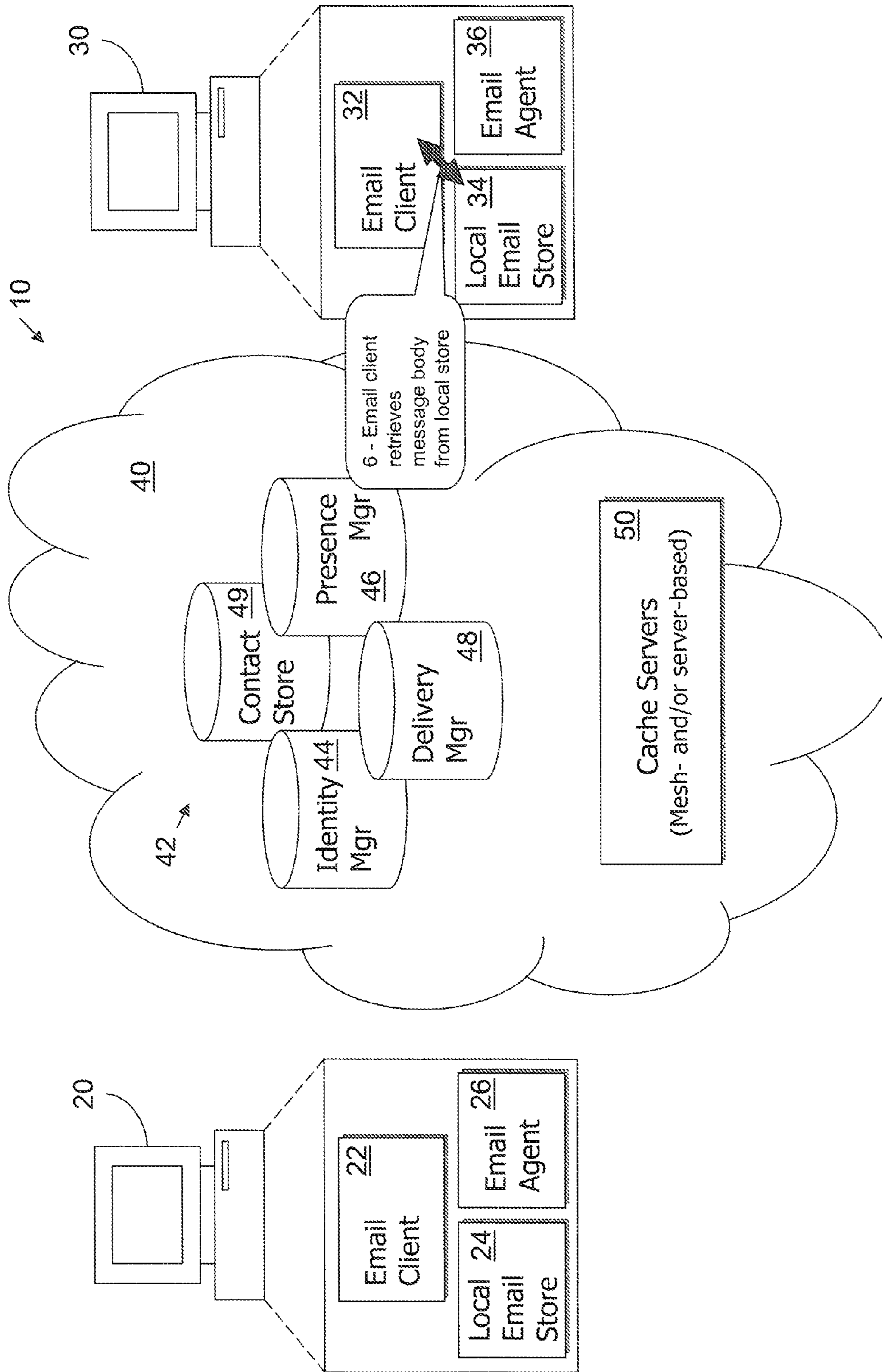


Fig. 2E

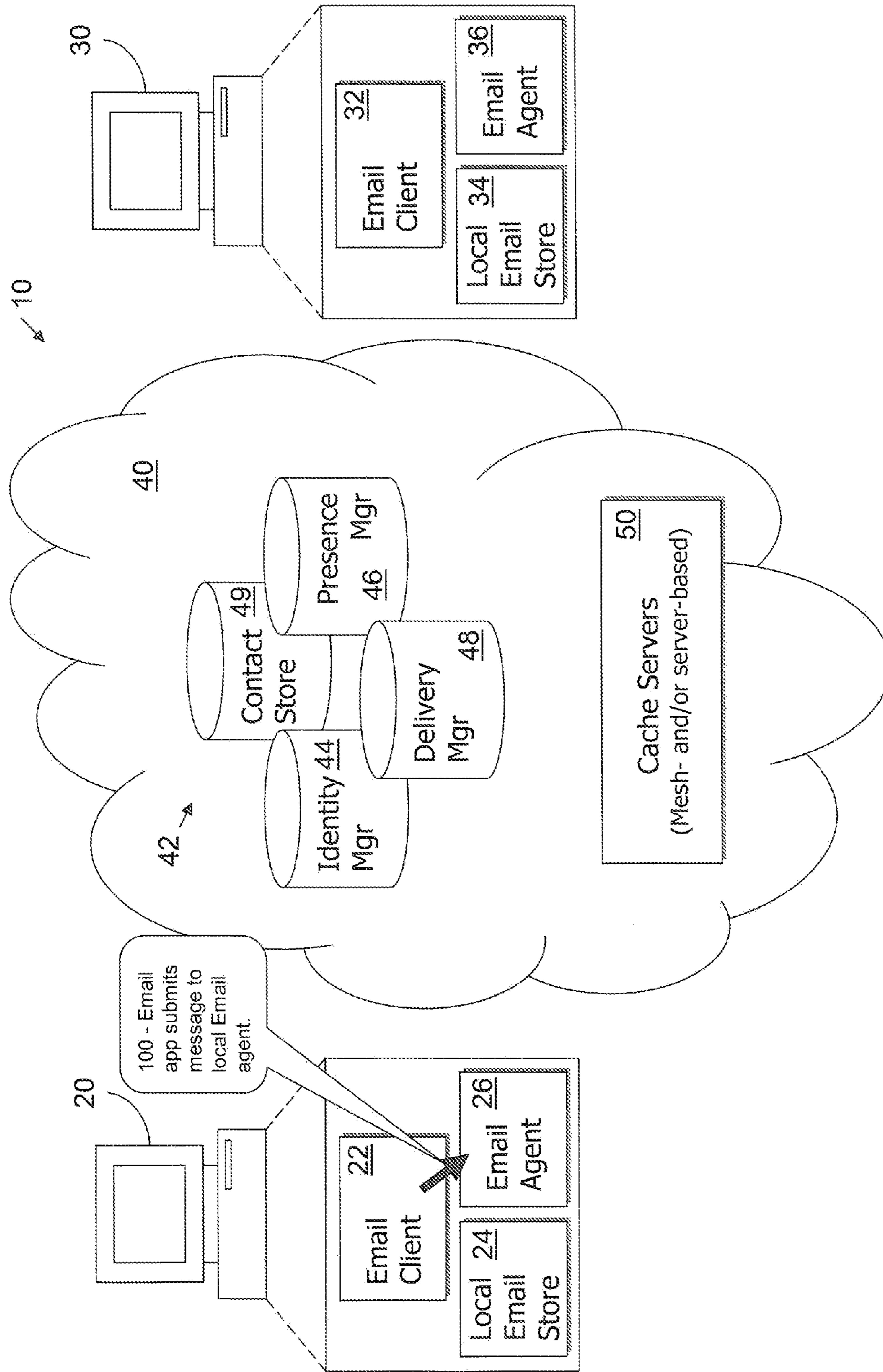


Fig. 3A

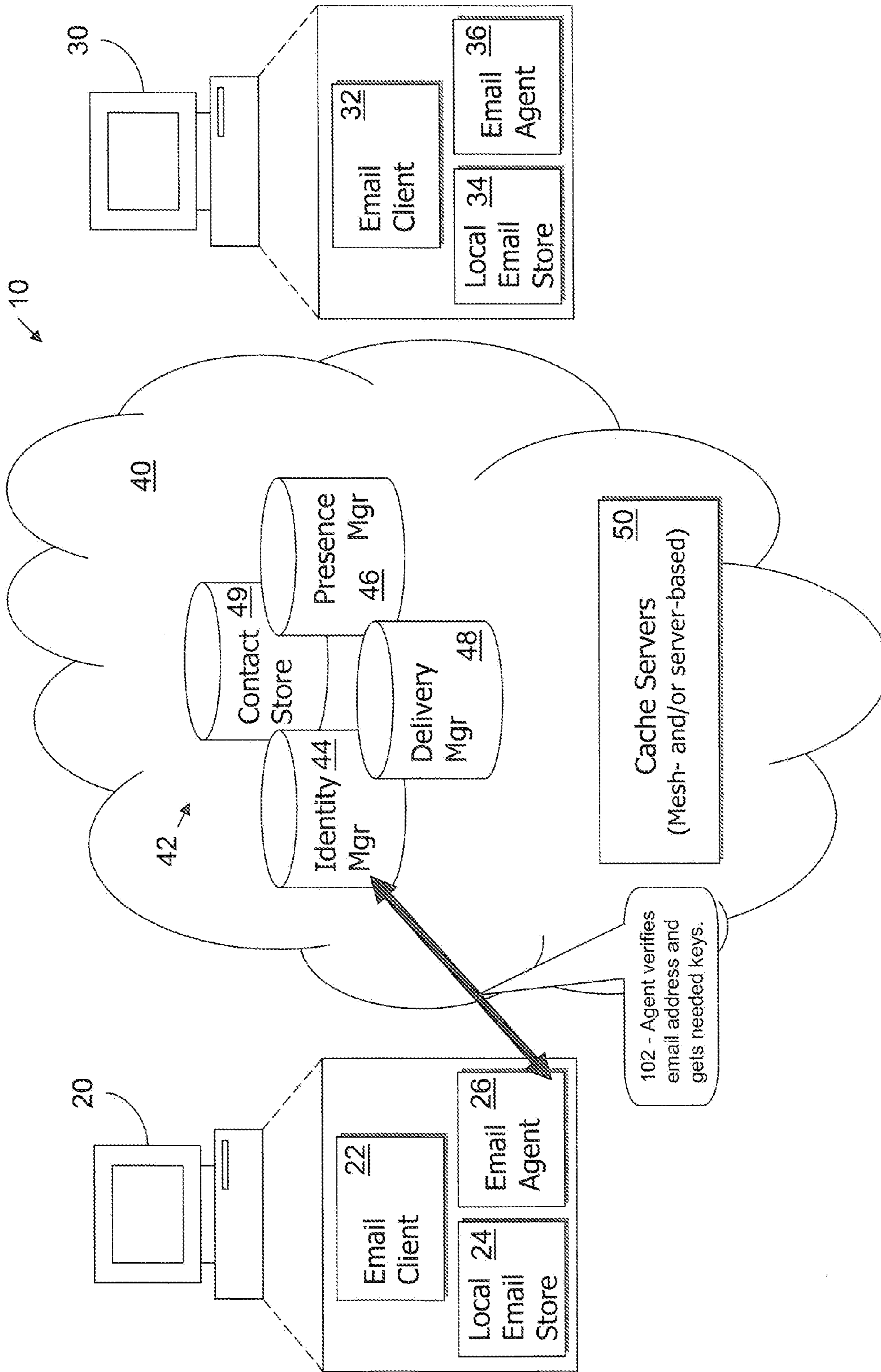


Fig. 3B

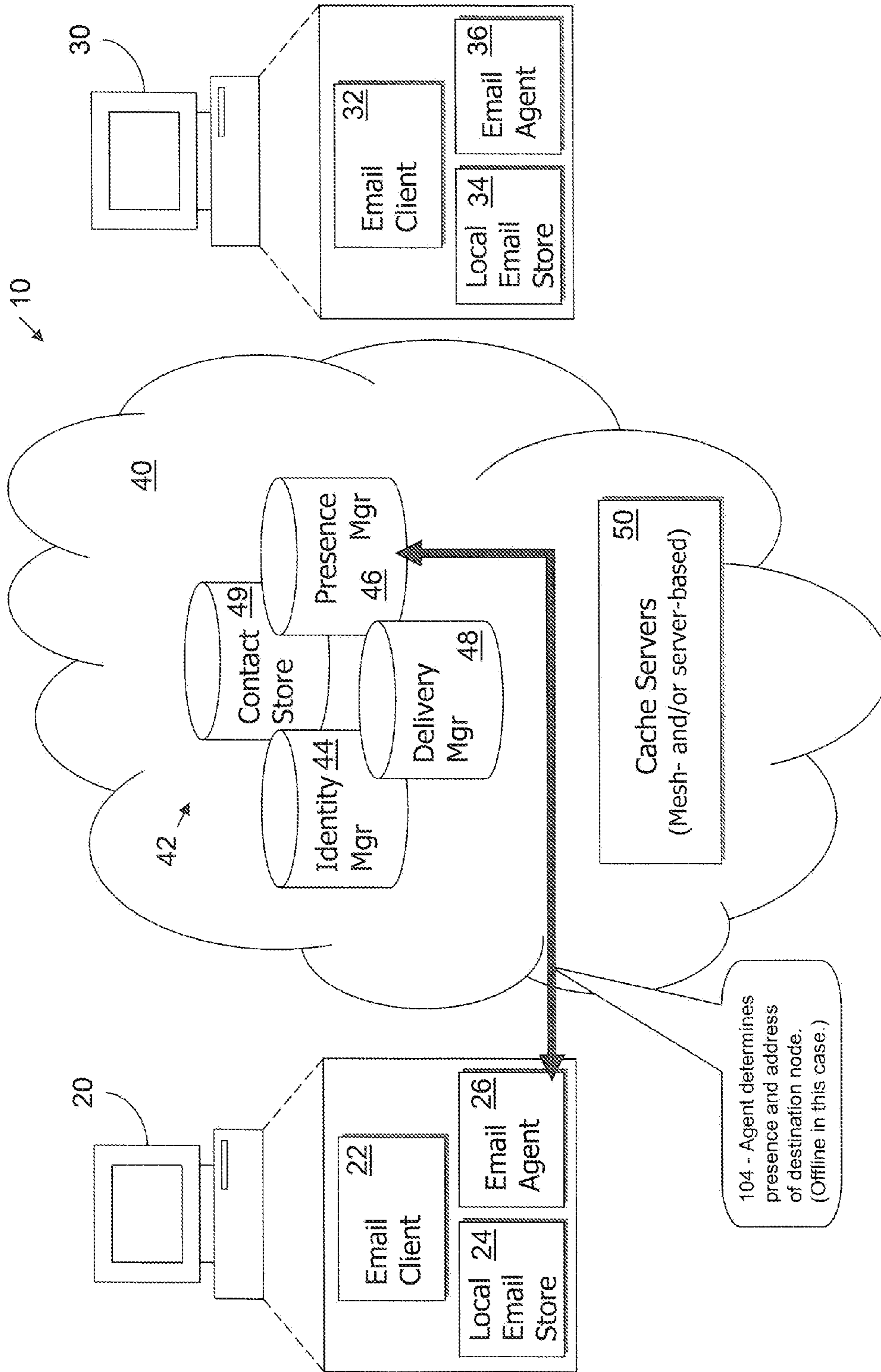


Fig. 3C

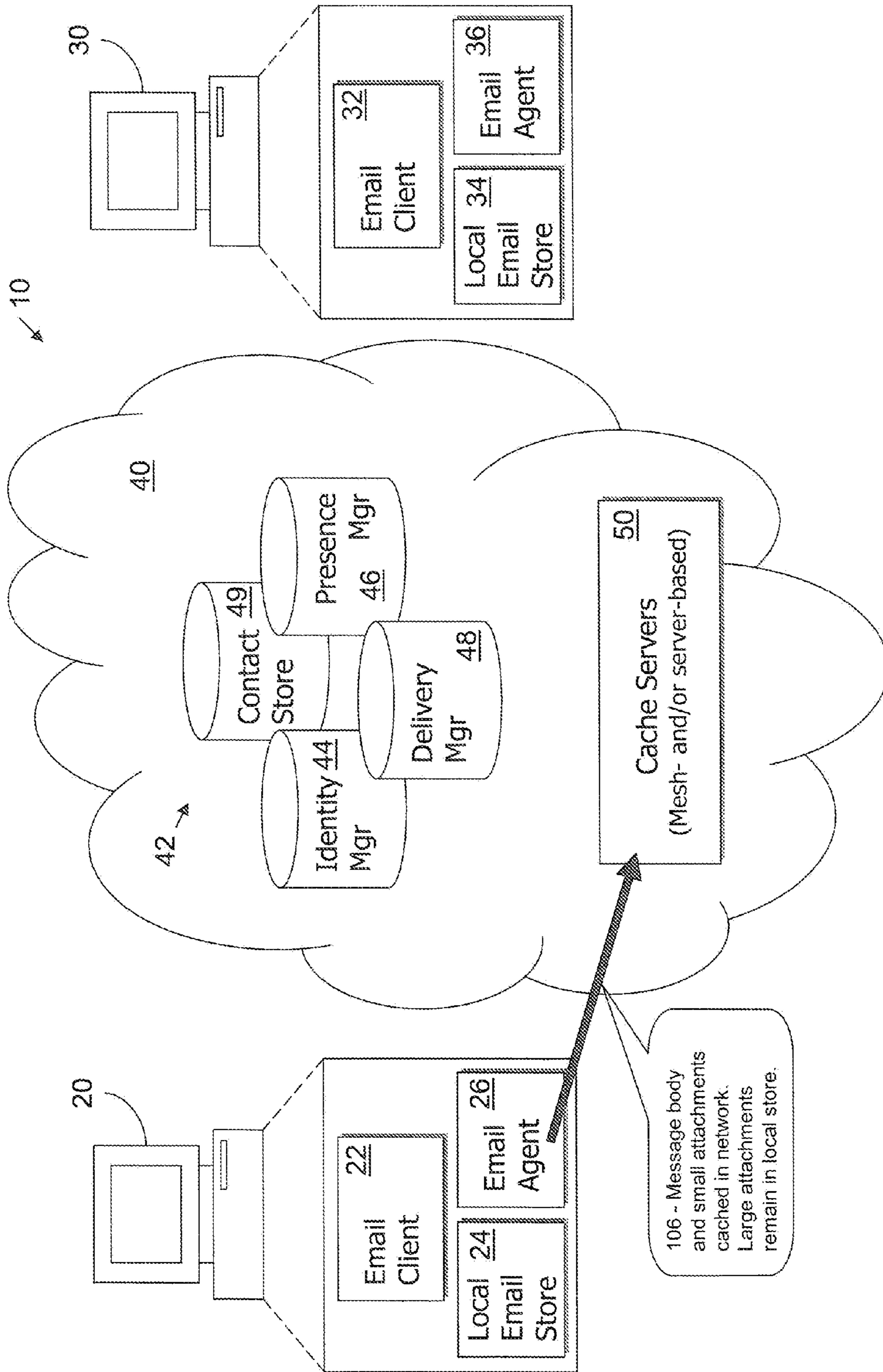


Fig. 3D

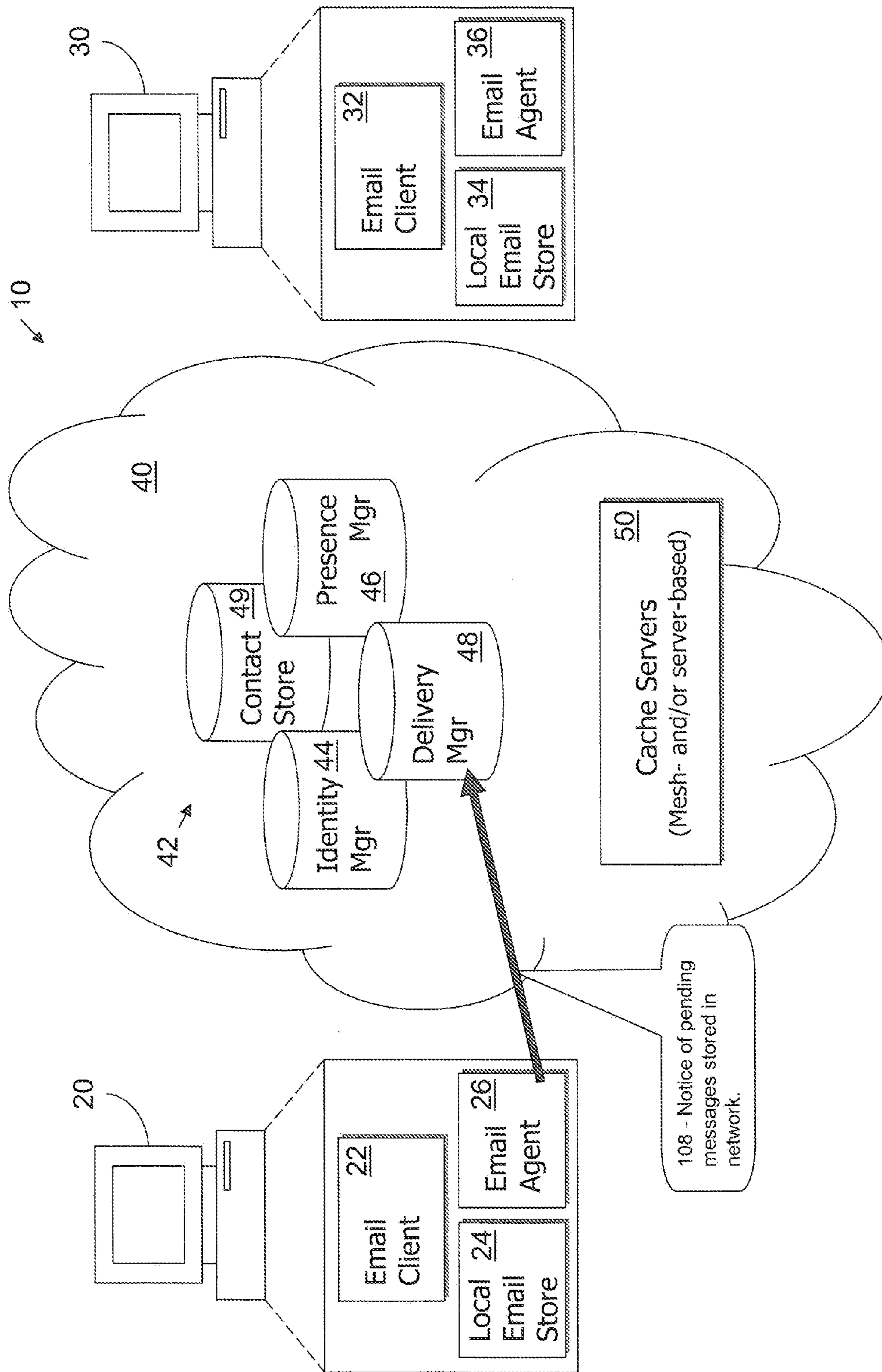


Fig. 3E

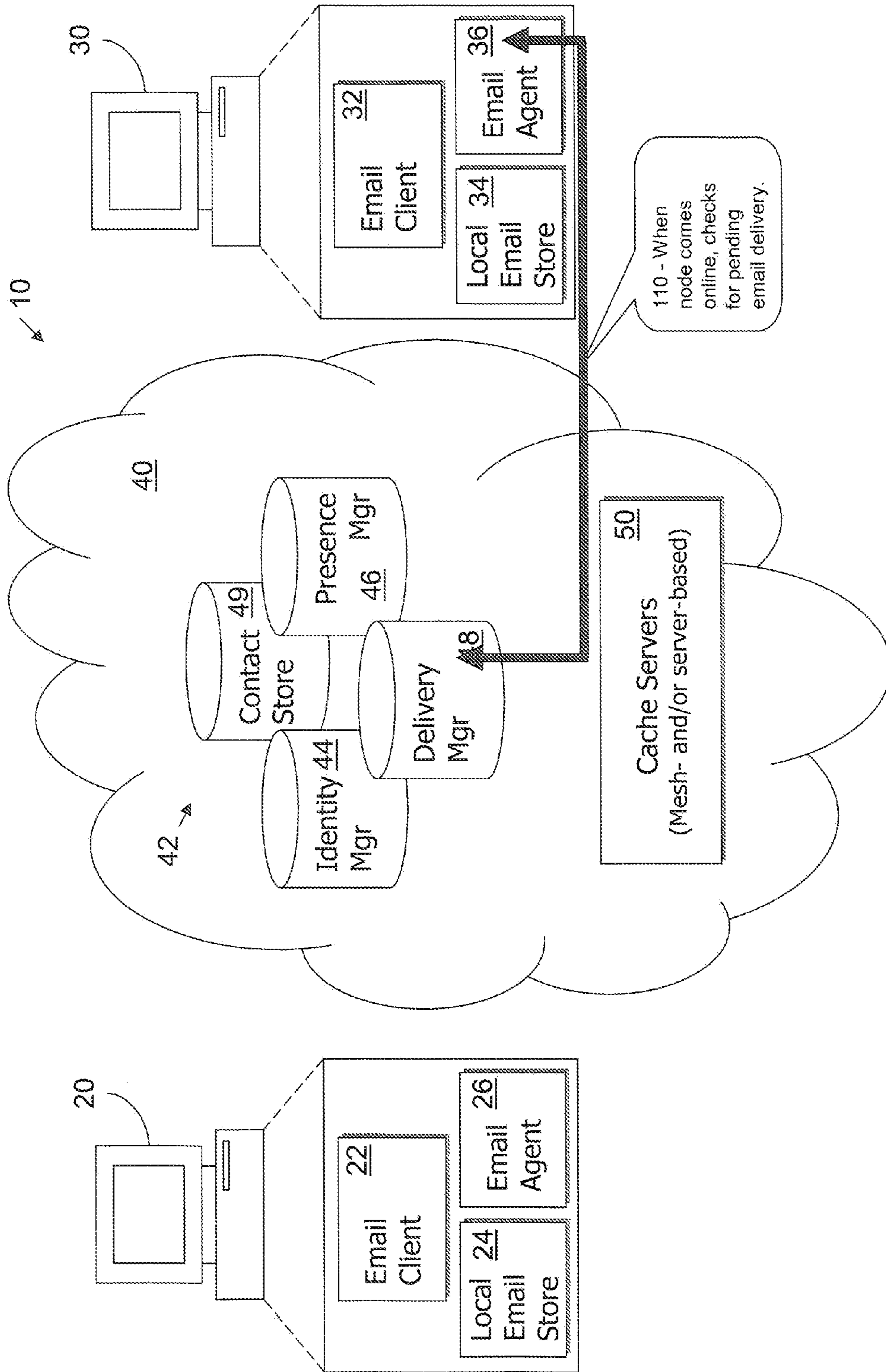


Fig. 3F

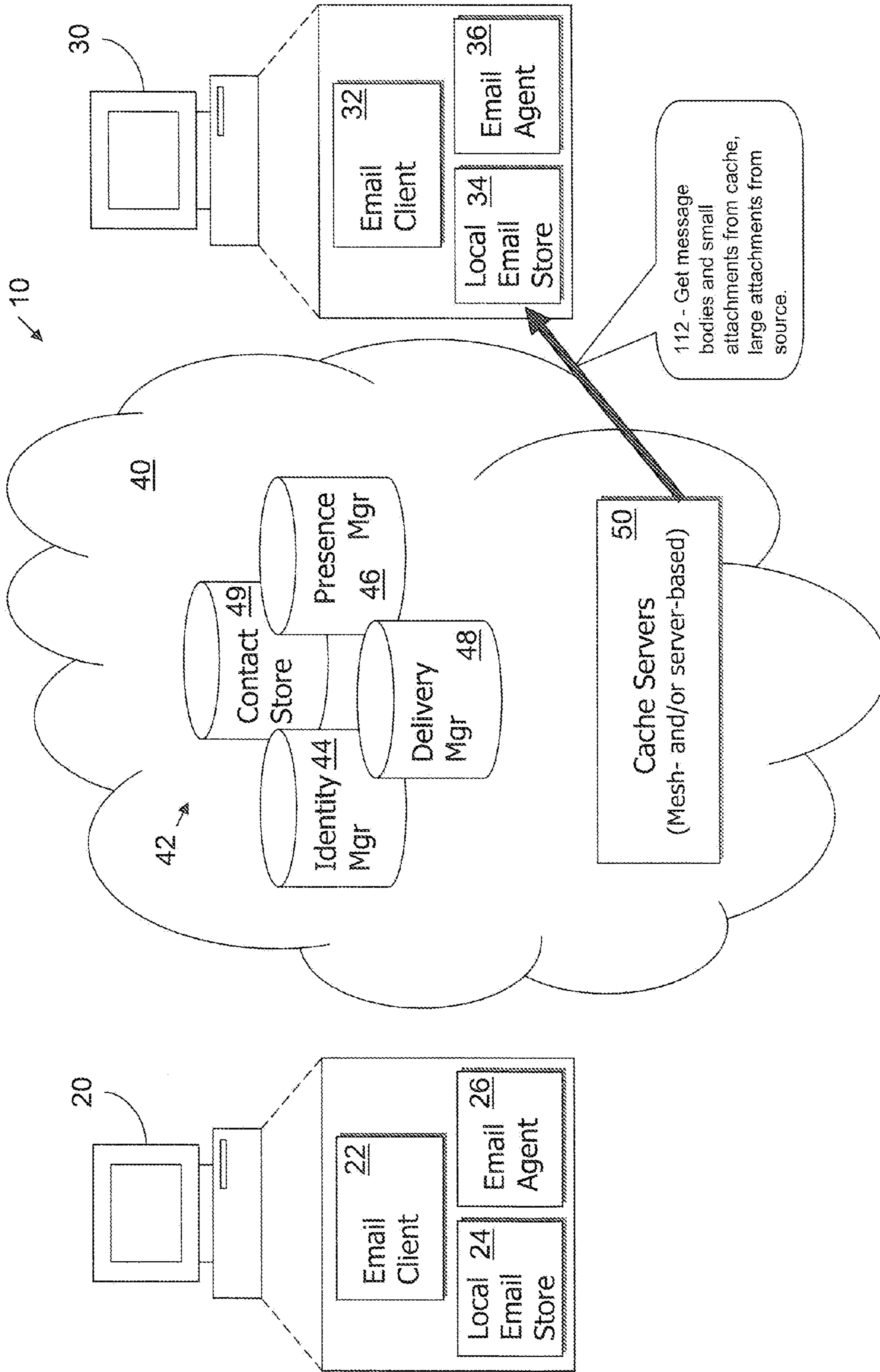


Fig. 3G

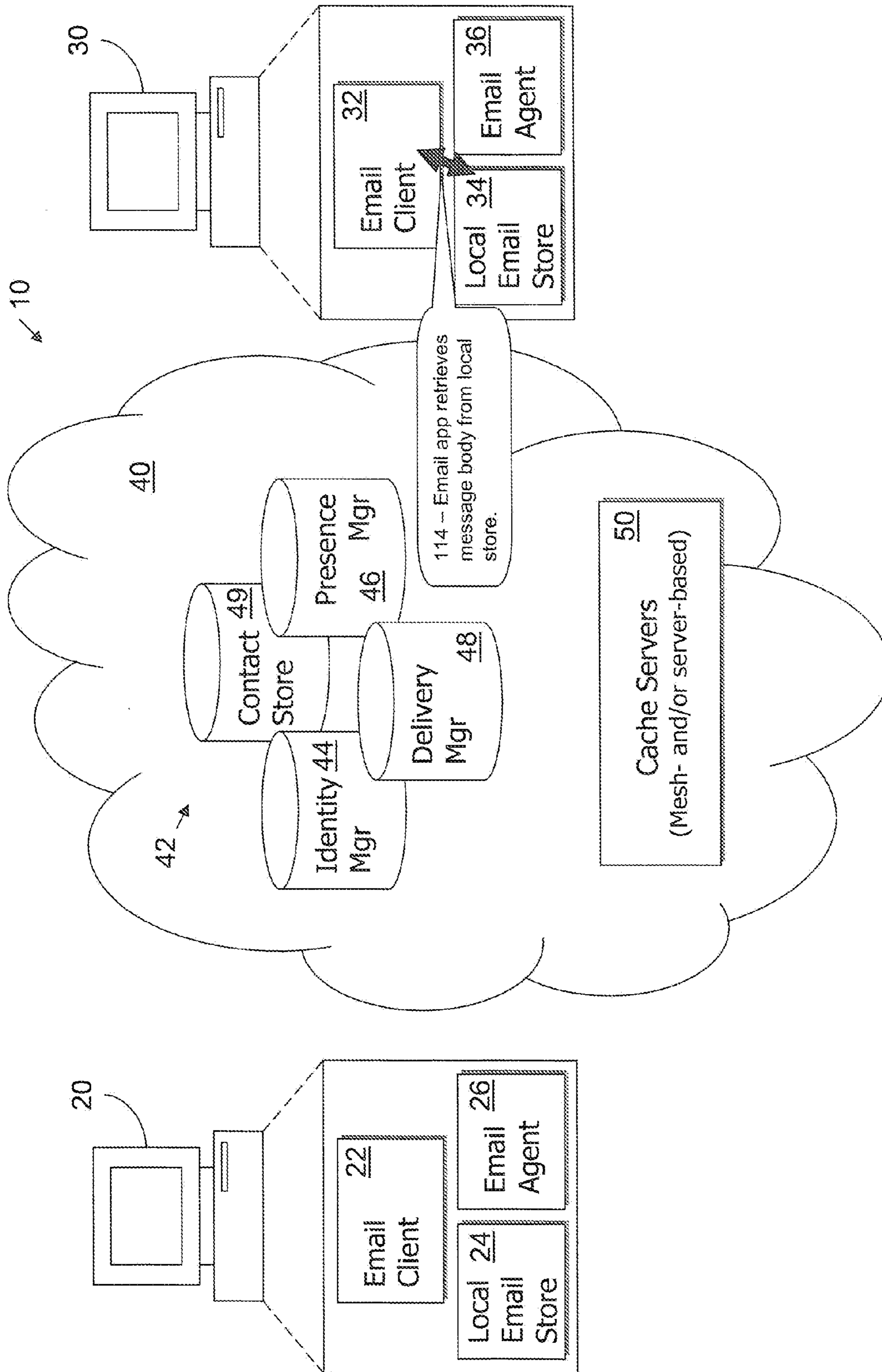


Fig. 3H

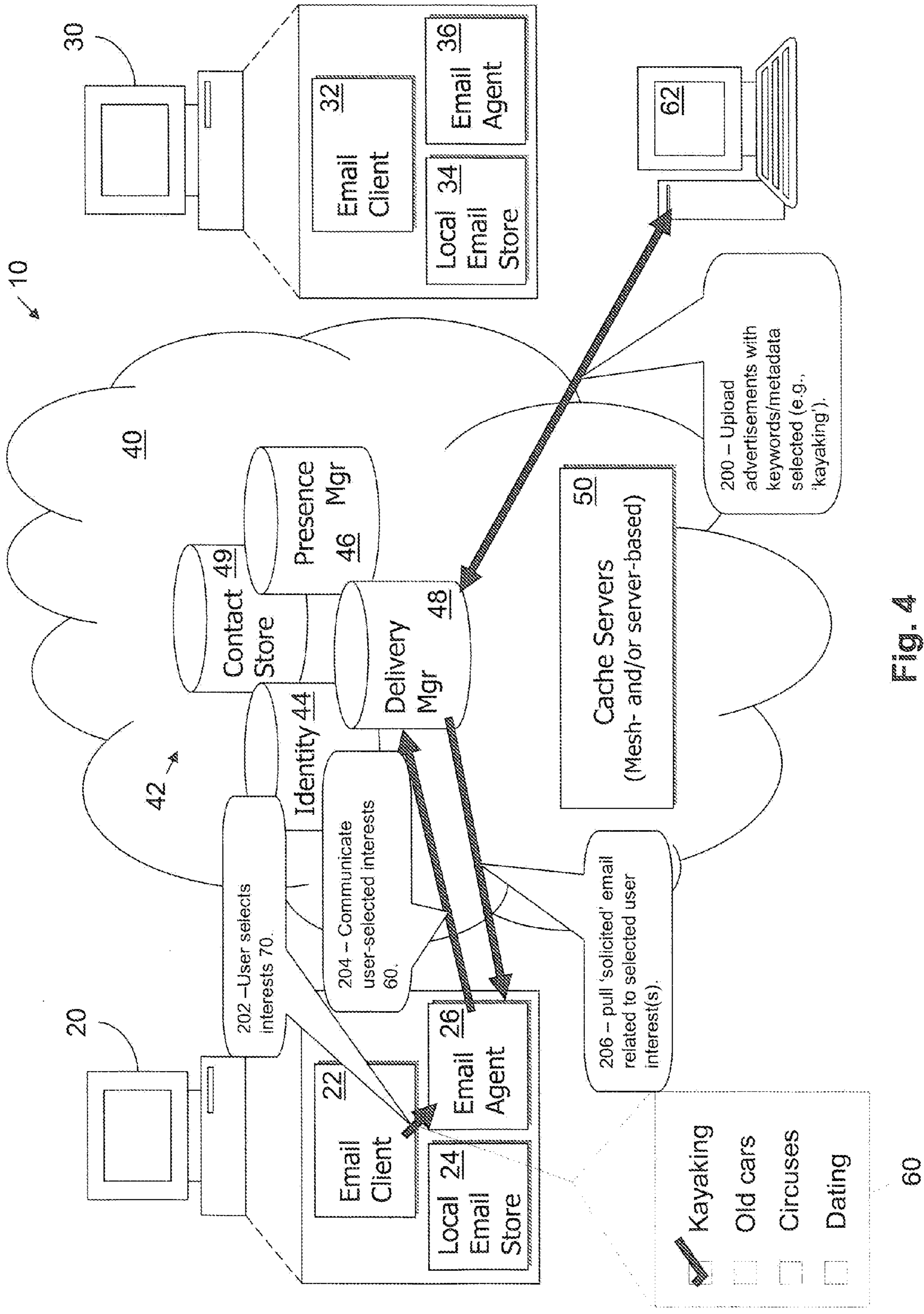


Fig. 4

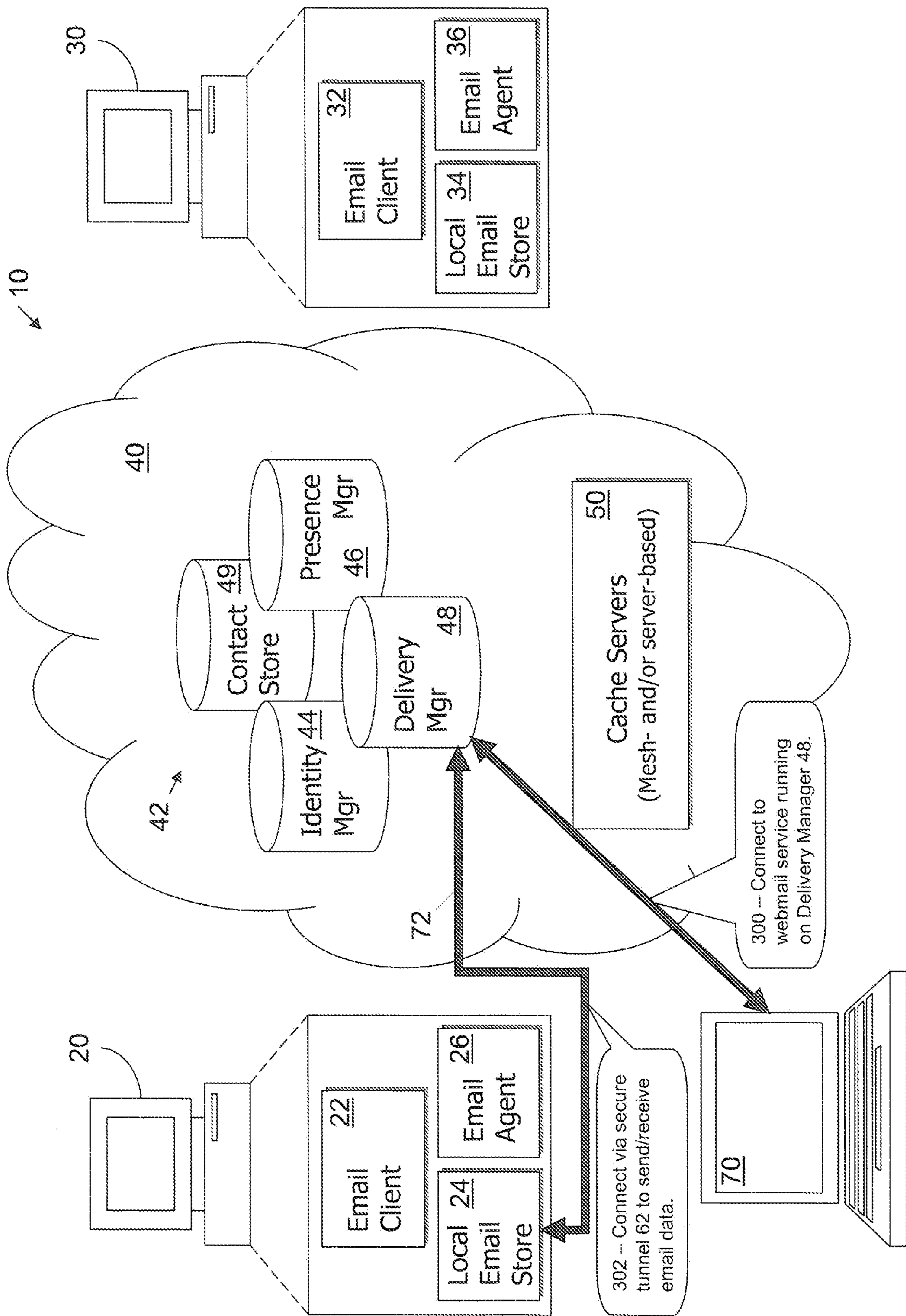


Fig. 5

PEER-TO-PEER EMAIL WITH VIDEO AND ADVERTISING ASPECTS

CROSS REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

This is a continuation application of a prior filed and currently pending application having Ser. No. 13/230,679 and a filing date of Sep. 12, 2011.

This application claims priority and is entitled to the priority date of currently pending U.S. non-provisional application Ser. No. 13/230,679, filed on Sep. 12, 2011, which claims priority and is entitled to the filing date of U.S. provisional application Ser. No. 61/381,988, filed on Sep. 12, 2010. The contents of the aforementioned applications are incorporated by reference herein.

This application also incorporates by reference in their entirety, for all purposes, U.S. Patent Application Publication Nos. 2009/0144380 and 2010/0031333.

BACKGROUND

Existing email systems may be centrally controlled. Simple Mail Transport Protocol (“SMTP”) is the de facto standard used on the internet today. A first SMTP server (e.g., mail.yin.com) may receive email messages from SMTP clients (e.g., Microsoft® Outlook, Mozilla® Thunderbird) executing on computers in the first SMTP server’s domain. The email messages may include one or more recipient email addresses (e.g., john@yang.net). The first SMTP server may route the received messages to a second SMTP server on the intended recipient’s domain (e.g., mail.yang.net) using known systems such as the domain name system (“DNS”). After receiving the email message, the second SMTP server may deliver the email messages to the intended recipient’s mailbox, which may be stored on the second SMTP server and made available to the intended recipient over the network.

SMTP servers may be configured to restrict the size of attachments which may be sent with an email message. Other SMTP servers may limit the amount of storage space (i.e., the size of a mailbox) allocated to a user to store emails and attachments. Still other SMTP servers may not protect or offer the capability of protecting emails and attachments associated therewith from malicious or otherwise unintended recipients, either locally or while in transit over a computer network.

In addition to the above, unsolicited advertising emails (“SPAM”) are ubiquitous on the Internet. It is estimated by some that as of 2007, 90 billion SPAM messages are sent every day, and that so-called “abusive email” accounts for up to 85% of incoming mail in a given email inbox.

Moreover, existing email systems exhibit various inefficiencies. For instance, centralized email server farms are estimated to consume over two billion dollars worth of energy annually around the world. In addition, current methods of encoding attachments involve the use of base64, which encodes attachments as 7-bit representations, rather than traditional 8-bit. Base64 introduces approximately 30% of overhead to each attachment sent. Some estimate that attachments make up 80% of email traffic on the Internet. CPU cycles are also required to perform this encoding on the sending user’s computer, as well as perform the decoding on the recipient user’s computer. This processing inefficiency for changing encoding of attachments from 8-bit to 7-bit and back to 8-bit is a material significant overhead for large files such as HD videos.

Email users often desire to exchange video files, but video files, including high resolution video files suitable for large screens and HD displays such as HD video, blu-ray video, Imax, and 3D video files, typically are quite large, and as noted above, many email systems will not permit the exchange of attachments beyond a certain size. A meter or other indicator of the progress of sending and delivery in the email user interface is a feature of the client interface of the invention. This feature allows the user to see the progress of sending and receiving large file so that they do not become confused as to the status of the delivery. Playing the incoming file, such as an HD video file, as it is being delivered is also desirable, and the invention permits that to occur, so that when a large video file is sent, the user can play it during the process of arriving, and play it to conclusion while the rest of it is delivered, all in high resolution on a large format display such as an HD television or display. Using those types of displays will also afford the use of video advertisements including large-file, high-resolution video advertising whether delivered or streamed, paid delivery services, and other revenue-generating aspects into video file exchange.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The accompanying drawings illustrate aspects of the present invention. In such drawings:

FIG. 1 depicts an example email system.

FIGS. 2A-E depict an email transmission on a system where the sender and the intended recipient are both online simultaneously.

FIGS. 3A-H depict an email transmission on a system where the intended recipient is offline.

FIG. 4 depicts an example method of preventing unsolicited emails.

FIG. 5 depicts a computer using webmail from a remote location to obtain a user’s email from his or her computer.

The above described drawing figures illustrate aspects of the invention in at least one of its exemplary embodiments, which are further defined in detail in the following description. Features, elements, and aspects of the invention that are referenced by the same numerals in different figures represent the same, equivalent, or similar features, elements, or aspects, in accordance with one or more embodiments.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS EMBODIMENTS

A Peer-to-Peer (“P2P”) email and social networking system is provided for use by a plurality of users to exchange emails and attachments. Such a system may be controlled by one or more central servers, or it may be controlled by decentralized services distributed over a mesh network. Such a mesh network may comprise a plurality of node computers, each running a P2P email client according to the present disclosure. Node computers may be alternatively referred to as “peers.” Emails may be stored in mailboxes residing on each node, rather than centrally located. The system may encrypt emails during transmission, and the emails may remain encrypted while stored at each node computer.

In some embodiments, the system may allow the user of each node computer to configure her email client with the user’s interests (e.g., kayaking). Those interests may be communicated to a central server or decentralized distributed service, where they may be associated with the user’s email address, so that potential advertisers may search by interest type, and send solicited emails to users associated with the searched-for interest types. Similarly, a user’s or users’ group

profiles and demographics are known, that information may drive advertisements, or the file type and size in an attachment, for delivered-content services to users. If that information is unknown, as is the case for user-generated email with an attachment, also known as user-generated content, advertisements may be driven separately or together, combining knowledge about user profiles and attachment or email-message-content type and topical nature, keywords, popularity on the network or metadata.

With or without a media player integrated into the email client software, the system may require users to observe advertisements, without being able to skip or delete them and, if the user forwards the same message and attachment to another recipient(s), those subsequent recipient(s) will also see the advertisement. The associated revenue for displaying the advertisement to the recipients in such super-distribution continues to accrue to the provider of the P2P email and social networking system.

In the social networking aspects of the invention, the agent is constructed to communicate the profile to the company to drive demographic ads, and also to synchronize contact updates, and to share out social information, miniblogs, photos, videos, articles, blogs, etc., in a decentralized networking manner.

There is a need to import contacts into the p2p email and social network system so that users can begin to more easily email and otherwise communicate with desired contacts. The system of the invention is constructed to use integrated, unified messaging capabilities, and embodiments include utilizing telephony, video telephony and chat, blogging, instant messaging, and tweeting, to socialize them.

The invention is constructed to support social-media sharing and is constructed to enable users to email large, rich media files such that they can view, play and prioritize the content as it is being delivered, and can communicate with a back channel, such as a chat or instant-messaging paths. The invention may also be constructed to enable sender and recipient to chat on a back channel, or call each other about the receipt of information to discuss it, such as to discuss a photo, to inform about receiving a large video, or to confirm receipt of the large video.

The invention may also be constructed to enable users to search among a group or other users on the P2P email and decentralized social network system. The invention may also be constructed to enable groups to form around different activity and interest types.

Embodiments of the invention may be constructed to support simple uploading to sites for traditional online centralized photo, video, or social sharing, completing the UGC loop in a triangle—direct to each other and up to and from sharing sites. In other embodiments, the system may be configured to provide remote access to the user's local email when the user is away from her local computer. Such access may be provided via a webmail webpage interfacing via a secure tunnel to the user's local email store.

FIG. 1 depicts an example P2P email system 10 comprising node computers such as sender 20 and recipient 30. Sender 20 may be a computer controlled by a first user intending to send an email message to a recipient 30. Recipient 30 likewise may be a computer controlled by a second user who is the intended recipient of the email message. Sender 20 and recipient 30 may be connected by a network 40. Sender 20 may include an email client 22, a local email store 24, and an email agent 26. Recipient 30 likewise may include an email client 32, a local email store 34, and an email agent 36.

Network 40 may be a local or wide-area computer network, including the Internet. The P2P email system 10 may be

controlled by components on network 40, such as decentralized distributed services 42 including identity manager 44, presence manager 46, delivery manager 48, and contact store 49, as well as cache servers 50. The distributed services 42 will be described in further detail below. While decentralized distributed services 42 are shown having the four components 44, 46, 48 and 49 as being separate, these components may alternatively reside on a single server, and there may be more than one server hosting one or more of these services. Moreover, additional services which are not shown (e.g., a gateway server for sending emails to traditional email domains) may also be included.

Email clients 22 and 32 may include user interfaces resembling traditional email clients (e.g., Outlook, Thunderbird), and may be configured to allow a user to draft, send and receive P2P emails. Email clients 22 and 32 may further include interfaces allowing a user to select interests (e.g., kayaking, dating), or contact demographic and interest profile information, or browsing history data, which may be communicated to decentralized distributed services 42 so that potential advertisers may communicate solicited emails to clients 22 and 32, as will be discussed further below.

Local email stores 24 and 34 may be portions of memory (e.g., on a local hard drive) which may be used to store email messages and associated attachments. In other words, local email stores 24 and 34 may serve similar roles as mailboxes on traditional SMTP servers. Messages stored in local email stores 24 and 34 may be encrypted. The amount of space allocated to a user may be configured, and in some embodiments may be limited only by the computer's storage capabilities. In addition to emails and attachments, local mail stores 24 and 34 may store interest information (a.k.a. user metadata), user contacts (e.g., the user's friends residing on P2P email system and elsewhere), user profiles (e.g., photos available for viewing, whom may view the photos, personal information and to whom it is available), group membership (e.g., open or closed groups of users of P2P email system 10 having common interests/metadata/contacts) or the like. Interest information, contacts, profiles and other similar information may be configured by a user using email clients such as 22 or 32.

Email agents 26 and 36 may be processes executing on node computers such as sender 20 or recipient 30 forming the P2P network. While a computer such as sender 20 or recipient 30 is connected to network 40 and is executing its email agent (26 or 36), that computer may be considered 'online' for purposes of the P2P network and this discussion.

Contact store 49 may be a central server or servers, or it may be a service distributed among various nodes in the P2P email system 10. It may contain information allowing peers on P2P email system 10 to locate other peers, including information similar to that stored in local email stores described above like interest information, contacts, metadata, social profile, demographics, location, group membership, and the like. Peers may be searched at contact store 49 using various search values, such as interests, group membership, friendship networks, personal profiles, and the like. In some embodiments, users may synchronize information stored in their local email stores 24, 34 such as metadata, profiles, and contacts with information contained in contact store 49. In other embodiments where contact store 49 is a service distributed among various nodes, there may be a central contact store (not shown) which is configured to synchronize all nodes on which contact store 49 is contained.

Cache servers 50 may comprise one or more computers on network 40 which may be used as intermediate points in email communications between computers such as sender 20 and

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recipient **30**. Cache servers **50** may be configured to cache at least a portion of email messages, as well as attachments thereto. In some embodiments, each cache server may be a node computer, similar to sender **20** or receiver **30**, forming another peer on the P2P system. Additionally or alternatively, cache servers **50** may be specialized computers maintained specifically for the purpose of caching emails. In some embodiments, cache servers may only cache attachments having a size smaller than a predetermined size (e.g., <50 Megabytes).

A given email message in transition between sender **20** and recipient **30** may be stored at a number of cache servers **50** while awaiting delivery, providing redundancy and high availability of the email message to recipient **30** in case some of the cache servers become unavailable (e.g., go offline). Moreover, cache servers **50**, which may simply be peers or node computers on P2P system **10**, may be configured to forward email messages to other intermediate peers closer to the recipient's destination. The cache servers may also be configured to forward email messages to multiple recipients' destinations, particularly in the case of a permitted opt-in delivery of content or advertisement in email messages to a large group of recipients. Additionally or alternatively, if a given cache server is going to go offline, it may forward copies of its stored pending email messages/attachments and/or notify the P2P email system of the email's new location.

The P2P email system **10** will now be explained by example. An example email communication between two node computers **20** and **30**, which are online simultaneously, is shown in FIGS. 2A-E. In step **1** of FIG. 2A, email client application **22** submits an email message created by a first user to email agent **26**. In step **2** of FIG. 2B, email agent **26** communicates with identity manager **44** to verify the recipient email address(es) contained in the email message, and to obtain one or more public keys corresponding to the verified email address(es). The public keys may be used by email agent **26** to encrypt the email message and/or any the message's attachments.

Identity manager **44** may take various forms. In some embodiments, identity manager **44** may be a central database running a hash table or similar data structure for relating email addresses to public keys. In other embodiments, identity manager **44** may be a distributed hash table ("DHT"), such as Content Addressable Network ("CAN"), Chord, Kademlia, Pastry, P-Grid, Tapestry or NeoNet, to name a few. DHTs are a class of decentralized distributed systems that provide a lookup service similar to a hash table. They are well-known in the art, and therefore need not be described further here. Email addresses such as the recipient email address may comprise the names of the hash table, and the value(s) corresponding to each name may be one or more public keys. Email agents such as **36** each may possess private keys usable to decrypt messages encrypted with the one or more public keys.

In step **3** of FIG. 2C, sender email agent **26** may communicate with presence manager **46** to determine whether recipient **30** is online. If recipient **30** is online, sender email agent **26** may obtain recipient's network address (e.g., IP address), and may indicate in the client user interfaces network-wide, or within a network sub-group, where sender or recipient are an existing client contact that the sender and recipient are online or offline, i.e., present or not present

Presence manager **46** may be a central server configured to track the presence of email clients and make that information available to email agents such as **26** and **36**. Presence manager may be a central server or decentralized service, implementing various protocols, such as the Extensible Messaging and

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Presence Protocol ("XMPP"), for real-time or near-real-time presence information. Jabber Instant Messaging and Presence technology is based on XMPP, and may be used in some embodiments as presence manager **46**.

Once sender email agent **26** has obtained the network address of recipient **30** from presence manager **46**, sender email agent **26** may transmit the email message and any attachments thereto directly to recipient email agent **36** in step **4** of FIG. 2D. When recipient email agent **36** receives the email message, in step **5** of FIG. 2D, it may store the email message (which may remain encrypted) and attachments thereto in local email store **34**.

When the user of recipient **30** executes email client **32** to check her email, in step **6** of FIG. 2E, recipient email client **32** may communicate with local email store **34** to obtain all recipient's email messages, including the newest message just received, as well as any attachments thereto. If the messages are encrypted, email client **32** may use its private key, corresponding to the public key described above, to decrypt messages.

The above discussion describes an email transmission where both sender **20** and recipient **30** are online simultaneously. However, there is no guarantee that recipient **30** will be online at the moment sender **30** transmits an email message. FIGS. 3A-H and the following discussion describe one possible way an email may be transmitted between sender **20** and recipient **30** under such a scenario.

In step **100** shown in FIG. 3A, similar to step **1** of FIG. 2A, email client application **22** submits an email message created by a user to email agent **26**. Similar to step **2** in FIG. 2B, in step **102** of FIG. 3B, email agent **26** connects to identity manager **44** to verify the recipient email addresses contained in the email message, and to obtain public keys corresponding to the verified email addresses. And again, in step **104** in FIG. 3C, sender email agent **26** communicates with presence manager **46** to determine whether recipient **30** is online.

In the previous example, recipient **30** was online, and therefore available to receive the email message and attachments directly from sender **20**. However, in this example, recipient **30** is offline. Therefore, in step **106** of FIG. 3D, sender email agent **24** may communicate the message body of the email message and any attachments having a size less than a predetermined amount to cache servers **50** residing on network **40**. In some embodiments, attachments having sizes greater than the predetermined amount may remain stored locally on sender **20**. In step **108** of FIG. 3E, sender email agent **26** may notify delivery manager **48** that there are pending messages stored in network **40**, as well as where those pending message may be located (e.g., on which cache servers **50** the message is cached).

In some embodiments, delivery manager **48** may be a central server configured to store information regarding pending P2P email messages stored in network **40**. In other embodiments, delivery manager **48** may be a decentralized service such as a DHT or other similar distributed systems.

In some embodiments where delivery manager **48** is a DHT, the names may be recipient email addresses, or other email addresses with the file with the same DHT. The values associated with that data may include information necessary for recipient email agent **36** to obtain pending email messages from network **40**. Specifically, agent **36** will obtain those email messages from one or more of the nodes with the message, or attachment, on the network nodes concurrently and in pieces in a multi-source manner or swarm-delivery manner. Such information may include address information associated with particular cache servers **50** having cached copies of the pending email. The address information may be

a network address of the particular cache servers **50** storing the pending emails, or, if each cache server is merely another node similar to **20** or **30**, the address information may be an email address associated with each node.

In other embodiments, each email message or attachment may have a unique Universal Resource Name (“URN”). Recipient email agent **36** may be notified of any URNs associated with email messages or attachments destined for recipient **30**. A delivery manager **48** implementing a DHT may use URNs related to pending email messages and attachments as names, and the value(s) associated with each URN may be a Universal Resource Locator (“URL”). The URL may indicate where the email message/attachment identified by a URN may be found, as well as what method may be used to obtain the message/attachment (e.g., ftp://www.yin.com/attachment.jpg indicates that the file ‘attachment.jpg’ may be obtained from the domain yin.com using the ftp protocol).

Accordingly, when recipient **30** comes online, in step **110** of FIG. 3F, recipient email agent **36** may communicate with delivery manager **48** to determine whether there are pending email messages on network **40** which are intended for recipient **30** and to identify one or more cache servers **50**, or other email addresses or attachment files, where those messages are located. In some embodiments, recipient email agent **36** may next communicate with presence manager **44** to determine which of the identified nodes are currently online and those nodes’ network addresses.

Next, in step **112** of FIG. 3G, recipient local email store **34** (or alternatively, recipient email agent **36**) may communicate with the identified nodes of the cache servers **50** to retrieve message bodies and attachments having a size less than the predetermined amount described above.

Attachments larger than the predetermined size may be obtained from the original sender **30**, assuming sender **30** is currently online. If sender **20** is not currently online, recipient **30** may periodically query presence manager **46** so that when sender **20** comes back online, recipient **30** may then obtain the large attachment directly from sender **20**. Alternatively, recipient **30** may obtain that attachment from other email addresses on the network nodes with the message and or file attachments singularly or in unison as a multisource or swarm delivery. If the sending and delivery process is interrupted it may smart resume where it left off.

In some embodiments, where local email store **34** or email agent **36** must download multiple emails from cache servers **50**, it may prioritize which emails/attachments will be retrieved first. For instance, an email client **32** may provide an interface for a user to edit contacts and sort them by various criterion (e.g., degrees of separation of friendship, age, etc.). Using this priority information, email client **32** or agent **36** may retrieve emails/attachments in the order of which its contacts have been sorted by the user. This priority information may be synchronized with contact store **49** when convenient.

When the user of recipient device wishes to read the received message(s), he or she may use recipient email client **32** to view email messages, including newly received messages, stored in local email store **34** in step **108** of FIG. 3H.

In some embodiments, sender **20** may be configured to verify that recipient **30** received the email address. For instance, recipient email agent **36** may send an acknowledgment to sender **20** once recipient local email store **34** has received and stored the entirety of the email and any attachments thereto. Additionally or alternatively, Sender **20** may query recipient **30** to determine whether recipient **30** received the message. In some embodiments, recipient **30** may notify one of the services in decentralized distributed services **42**

(e.g., delivery manager **48**) that a message having a particular URN has been delivered. In such a case, sender **20** may verify that the message was received by communicating with the services **42**.

In the P2P email system disclosed herein, some embodiments may be configured to prevent unsolicited email and/or provide users with emails related to topics of interest. Turning to FIG. 4, in step **200**, an advertiser **62** of a particular interest (e.g., a kayak manufacturer) or with a video, image, or audio, or text file attachment containing email, may communicate with decentralized distributed services **42** to upload advertisement information, which may be permission based, and may include metadata such as keywords (e.g., kayak) as well as advertising emails and/or attachments. One common type of advertising attachment is a video advertisement. As will be discussed below, in some embodiments, email clients include video player interfaces for playing video file attachments, and advertising videos may be assigned to videos based on video size, popularity and/or user demographic information, and recipient may be unable to skip the advertisement.

Email client **22** may include an interface including a list **60** of selectable interests. A user of email client **22** may choose one or more interests from list **60** in step **202**, and those choices may be communicated to decentralized distributed services **42** (e.g., to delivery manager **48**) in step **204**. In step **206**, email agent **26** may “pull” down the advertisements uploaded by advertiser **62** in step **200**. Note that because sender **20** indicated interest in kayaks, the email sent in step **206** is not unsolicited.

In some embodiments, advertisers such as **62** may be charged a fee for each of their advertisement emails “pulled” from the system **10**. Additionally or alternatively, a ratings system similar to those used in television (e.g., Nielsen ratings, which are based on the habits of home TV viewers) may be implemented to ascertain how much a given advertisement is “pulled,” for purposes of charging advertisers such as **62**. In another embodiment, the user may be charged for delivery of content, and delivery may further be into a secure folder, zone, or channel, which may be spam-free, dedicated to one or a small authorized group of senders, and may be branded to identify it. The delivered content may also share the same secure login as an online secure site with the same publisher or vendor of content (media, medical, billing delivery, etc.), and may be readable or playable online in the secure folder/zone/channel when inside of that location to provide additional security, digital rights management and content locker protection.

In another aspect, a user who is away from her computer containing her P2P emails may nevertheless wish to access those emails. In traditional email systems (e.g., SMTP), such a user may have access to a webmail interface, which may comprise a HTML page which the user may access with a web browser. The user may enter her login information (e.g., a username and password), and upon successful authentication, the webpage may direct the user’s web browser to a second webpage which allows the user to view, manipulate, and create/send new email messages. This second web page may obtain email data from and interface with the same mail server (containing the user’s mailbox) which the user would normally log into with her local computer.

Webmail access similarly may be possible in some embodiments of the disclosed P2P email system **10**. Referring to FIG. 5, a user may be away from her computer **20**, but may wish to access email on her local email store **24** using a remote computer **70**. A central server or one of the decentralized distributed services **42** (such as delivery manager **48**) may include a webmail service. In step **300**, the user may

connect to the webmail service executing on decentralized distributed services **42** and provide login credentials to a login webpage. Upon successful authentication, the user may be redirected to a second webpage giving the user email access. Instead of communicating with the user's mailbox on a central SMTP server, however, in step **302**, the second webpage may communicate with the user's local email store **24** through a secure tunnel **72** to the user's computer **20**.

Although the above examples only describe the exchange of email messages between two node computers on P2P system **10**, those skilled in the art will understand that communications may occur between plural node computers. Moreover, communications may occur between a node computer on P2P system **10** and a traditional email system (e.g., hotmail, gmail, exchange server, etc.).

For example, one of the decentralized distributed services (e.g., a separate gateway server which is not shown) may be identified as a mail exchanger (MX) in a DNS. The Gateway server therefore may receive email messages/attachments sent from traditional email systems, destined for a recipient residing on the disclosed P2P email system **10**, and communicate those messages to the appropriate recipients using the above-described methods (depending on whether the user is online or offline).

Likewise, if a user on a node computer of P2P email system **10** desires to send an email message to an outside traditional email address, the user may communicate the message and any attachments to the gateway server. The gateway server may forward the message to the appropriate SMTP server using MX records in the DNS. In some embodiments, identity manager **44** may be configured with an index of domains that are part of P2P email system **10**. When sender **20** verifies the email address, such as in step **2** in FIG. **2B** or step **102** in FIG. **3B**, identity manager **44** may determine whether the recipient email address(es) are within the P2P email system **10**. If manager **44** makes that determination, then the process may proceed as described above. If a recipient email address is destined for an outside domain unrelated to the P2P email system **10**, however, sender **20** may be required to forward the email and any attachments to the gateway server for delivery to the outside domain.

In another aspect of the disclosure, the P2P email system **10** may provide efficient attachment distribution. In some instances, instead of using base64 to encode attachments to 7-bit representations, the P2P email system **10** may determine the URLs of attachments and make those URLs available through decentralized distributed services **42**. For instance, assume sender **20** sends an email message including a large attachment (i.e., too large to be stored on cache servers **50**) to recipient **30**. Also assume recipient **30** is online simultaneously with sender **20**. The email received by recipient **30** may not include the large attachment, encoded using Base64 or otherwise. Instead, the email received by recipient **30** may include a hyperlink (URL) to a location on sender **20** containing the large attachment, so that recipient **30** may initiate a connection to sender **20** and download the large attachment directly (e.g., using FTP, HTTP, BitTorrent, or other well-known transfer protocols). The initiation of the file transfer may not require intervention by the user of recipient **30**. Instead, recipient email client **32** may be configured to automatically initiate the transfer when the user opens the email or attachment.

In another aspect of the disclosure, large attachments such as video files may have characteristics such as size and popularity. When a video file is exchanged using disclosed P2P email systems, one or more advertisements (e.g., additional video files) may be assigned to the video file based on the size

of the video file and/or its popularity. Advertisements also may be assigned to video files based on demographic information relating to a sender and/or a receiver of the video file. Demographic information may be obtained from user profiles of the sender and/or receiver. Once an advertisement is assigned to a video-file-to-be-exchanged, a copy of the advertisement may be sent to the receiver of the video file. In some instances the receiver may be forced to view the advertisement before being permitted to view the video file itself. If the advertisement/message is forwarded to other recipients, advertisements may follow it from node to node.

In another aspect of the disclosure, the process of a user whether an existing member of the system or a new one without the P2P email and social networking system, may request, via a link or icon button, delivery of a file from a website, and a software routine on the server side of the website, or on the server side of the company providing the P2P email and social networking system, then send to the requestor a link for that user to get the system, and to then receive the large file delivered to them, whether immediately, or at a later date based on the contact information provided including a legacy email address from the old email system. A recipient would receive a message that they have a big file sent to them, download and install the p2p email and social networking software system, then receive the large file delivery.

For example, if a 25-year-old male in Boston is the receiver of an email with a large video file attachment, then an advertisement targeted towards young men in urban areas may be identified and assigned to the email. Before the 25-year-old male receiver in Boston is permitted to download and/or view the video file, he may be forced to view all or a portion of the assigned advertisement, which may be delivered to him using the same methods as the large video file, which are discussed generally above.

P2P email clients such as **22** and **32** in the drawings may include in their user interfaces an interface for viewing videos. The email clients may be configured to start playing a video file on the user interface immediately after the download begins (in a streaming fashion), or the email clients may be configured to wait until the entire video file is downloaded before showing the video on the interface. In some embodiments that stream video, email clients may be configured to record streaming video. In other embodiments, email clients may be configured to upload videos to network devices having displays, such as tablet computers, HD televisions, smart phones, or to burn a disc to play it in a DVD or CD player and reach an audio or video device in the digital living room.

The p2p email and social networking system may also be resident on many platforms beyond personal computers, including but not limited to, set-top boxes, network accessible storage devices, cameras, media servers and other digital living room gear such as game consoles.

Assigning an advertisement to a video may include embedding an advertisement within the video, concatenating an advertisement to the beginning of the video, anywhere in the video, or at the end of the video, or simply attaching an advertisement to the email message to which the video is an attachment. In the latter case, email clients may be configured to search received emails for attachments that are flagged as advertisements first, and may force a user to view the advertisement before being permitted to view the main video attachment.

Revenue may be generated from the exchange of video files and/or the assignment of advertisements to those video files. For example, if a video file is stored on the computers of less than 1000 users, then the video file may not be assigned an advertisement when exchanged, and the receiver may not

be required to view an advertisement video before viewing the video attachment. However, if the video is stored on the computers of between 1001 and 99,999 users, then when the video is exchanged, it may be assigned one advertisement intended for a relatively small audience, and receivers may be forced to view this advertisement before viewing the video attachment. If the video file is more widely distributed (e.g., on computers of 100,000 users or more), then another different advertisement that is intended for a wider audience may be assigned to the video, and receivers may be forced to view this second advertisement before viewing the video attachment.

Advertisers such as 62 may be charged a fee for each of their advertisement videos that is assigned to a video-file-to-be-exchanged. Moreover and similar to above, a ratings system similar to those used in television (e.g., Nielsen ratings) may be implemented to ascertain how often a given advertisement video is assigned to videos for purposes of charging advertisers such as 62. Additionally or alternatively, P2P email clients with video playing interfaces may send out a notification when a user plays a particular advertisement and/or video, and the corresponding advertiser may be charged at that time.

In some embodiments, a website operator may include a link to a video that when selected, causes the user to be redirected to a download of a P2P email client such as those described above. The user may download and install the client so that the user can receive the video file using above-described systems in methods.

In other cases, a website link or icon can be selected that causes an email to be sent to a user's traditional email account. The email may include a link to a P2P email client, such as those described above, and once the user follows the link and installs the client, the user may be sent an email at the user's P2P email address that includes the video file as an attachment.

Aspects of the present specification may also be described as follows:

1. A method for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange, the method comprising the steps of: implementing a plurality of node computers in selective communication with one another, thereby forming a network, each of said node computers configured for sending an at least one email message to a select at least one of the other node computers; implementing an at least one cache server in selective communication with the node computers and configured for temporarily storing at least a portion of the at least one email message; implementing an email client in memory on each node computer, said email client configured for allowing a user to draft, send and receive email messages; implementing a local email store in memory on each node computer, said email store configured for storing email messages and any file attachments thereto; implementing an email agent in memory on each node computer, each said email agent configured for communicating with email agents of other node computers, thereby allowing for the transmission of the email messages and any file attachments thereto directly between the email clients of two or more node computers; and upon a sending user of a first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to an at least one receiving user of another one of the node computers: determining whether the node computer of each of the at least one receiving user is online; for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is online: transmitting the email message and any file attachments thereto directly to the online node computer of said receiving user; and upon receipt, storing the

email message and any file attachments thereto in memory on the online node computer of said receiving user; for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online: transmitting the email message to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval; transmitting any file attachments thereto having a size less than a predefined maximum size to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval; storing any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size in memory on the node computer of the sending user; upon the node computer of said receiving user subsequently going online, notifying said node computer of the existence and locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and retrieving from at least one of the online node computer of the sending user, the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and requiring each of the at least one receiving user to view advertising content prior to allowing access to the email message and any file attachments thereto.

2. The method according to embodiment 1, further comprising the steps of: implementing an identity manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing a network address of the user of each node computer along with associated encryption keys; implementing a presence manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the online status of each node computer; implementing a delivery manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the locations of any email messages and associated file attachments thereto that are pending delivery to the node computers of one or more receiving users; and implementing a contact store in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing contact information related to each node computer and the associated users thereof.

3. The method according to embodiments 1-2, further comprising the step of, upon the sending user desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to be received by the at least one receiving user, obtaining from the identity manager an at least one encryption key associated with the network address of each of the at least one receiving user for use in encrypting the email message and any file attachments thereto.

4. The method according to embodiments 1-3, further comprising the steps of, for each receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online: notifying the delivery manager of the existence and respective locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and querying the presence manager to determine which of the at least one cache server and node computer storing the email message and any file attachments thereto is currently online.

5. The method according to embodiments 1-4, wherein the step of retrieving and storing the email message and any file attachments thereto further comprises the steps of: retrieving from at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto, having a size less than the predefined maximum size, and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; upon determining that the node

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computer of the sending user is online, retrieving from the node computer of the sending user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and upon determining that

the node computer of the sending user is not online, retrieving from the at least one online node computer of another receiving user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user.

6. The method according to embodiments 1-5, further comprising the step of, upon receipt of the email message and any file attachments thereto, sending an acknowledgement receipt message to the node computer of the sending user.

7. The method according to embodiments 1-6, further comprising the step of automatically forwarding the email message and any file attachments thereto from a one of the cache servers to an at least one further one of the cache servers deemed to be relatively closer to the at least one node computer of the at least one receiving user.

8. The method according to embodiments 1-7, further comprising the step of, upon a one of the cache servers going offline, automatically forwarding any pending email messages and file attachments thereto stored by said cache server to an at least one other online cache server.

9. The method according to embodiments 1-8, further comprising the step of selecting said advertising content based on at least one of a size of said file attachments, a popularity level of said file attachments, a subject matter of said file attachments, demographic information related to the sending user, demographic information related to the at least one receiving user, an at least one expressed interest of the sending user, an at least one expressed interest of the at least one receiving user, and a number of node computers on which said file attachments are currently stored.

10. A method for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange, the method comprising the steps of: implementing a plurality of node computers in selective communication with one another, thereby forming a network, each of said node computers configured for sending an at least one email message to a select at least one of the other node computers; implementing an at least one cache server in selective communication with the node computers and configured for temporarily storing at least a portion of the at least one email message; implementing an email client in memory on each node computer, said email client configured for allowing a user to draft, send and receive email messages; implementing a local email store in memory on each node computer, said email store configured for storing email messages and any file attachments thereto; implementing an email agent in memory on each node computer, each said email agent configured for communicating with email agents of other node computers, thereby allowing for the transmission of the email messages and any file attachments thereto directly between the email clients of two or more node computers; and upon a sending user of a first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to an at least one receiving user of another one of the node computers: determining whether the node computer of each of the at least one receiving user is online; for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is online: transmitting the email message and any file attachments thereto directly to the online node computer of said receiving user; and upon receipt, storing the email message and any file attachments thereto in memory on the online node computer of said receiving user; and for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the

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node computer of said receiving user is not online: transmitting the email message to at least one of the at least one cache server and the-online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval; transmitting any file attachments thereto having a size less than a predefined maximum size to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval; storing any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size in memory on the node computer of the sending user; upon the node computer of said receiving user subsequently going online, notifying said node computer of the existence and locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; retrieving from at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto, having a size less than the predefined maximum size, and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is online, retrieving from the node computer of the sending user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is not online, retrieving from the at least one online node computer of another receiving user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; requiring each of the at least one receiving user to view advertising content prior to allowing access to the email message and any file attachments thereto; and selecting said advertising content based on at least one of a size of said file attachments, a popularity level of said file attachments, a subject matter of said file attachments, demographic information related to the sending user, demographic information related to the at least one receiving user, an at least one expressed interest of the sending user, an at least one expressed interest of the at least one receiving user, and a number of node computers on which said file attachments are currently stored.

11. A system for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange between a sending user and an at least one receiving user, the system comprising: a plurality of node computers in selective communication with one another, thereby forming a network, each of said node computers configured for sending an at least one email message to a select at least one of the other node computers; an email client in memory on each node computer, said email client configured for allowing a user to draft, send and receive email messages; a local email store in memory on each node computer, said email store configured for storing email messages and any file attachments thereto; and an email agent in memory on each node computer, each said email agent configured for communicating with email agents of other node computers, thereby allowing for the transmission of the email messages and any file attachments thereto between the email clients of two or more node computers; wherein, upon the sending user of a first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to the at least one receiving user of another one of the node computers, said node computers are configured for: determining whether the node computer of each of the at least one receiving user is online; for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is online: transmitting the email message and any file attachments thereto directly to the online node computer of said receiving user; and upon

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receipt, storing the email message and any file attachments thereto in memory on the online node computer of said receiving user; and for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online: transmitting the email message to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval; transmitting any file attachments thereto having a size less than a predefined maximum size to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval; storing any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size in memory on the node computer of the sending user; upon the node computer of said receiving user subsequently going online, notifying said node computer of the existence and locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and retrieving from at least one of the online node computer of the sending user, the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and requiring each of the at least one receiving user to view advertising content prior to allowing access to the email message and any file attachments thereto.

12. The system according to embodiment 11, further comprising: an identity manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing a network address of each user of the node computers along with associated encryption keys; a presence manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the online status of each node computer; a delivery manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the locations of any email messages and associated file attachments thereto that are pending delivery to the node computers of one or more receiving users; and a contact store in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing contact information related to each node computer and the associated users thereof.

13. The system according to embodiments 11-12, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon the sending user of the first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to be received by the at least one receiving user of at least one of the other node computers, obtaining from the identity manager an at least one encryption key associated with the network address of each of the at least one receiving user for use in encrypting the email message and any file attachments thereto.

14. The system according to embodiments 11-13, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon determining that a given node computer of a receiving user is not online: notifying the delivery manager of the existence and respective locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and querying the presence manager to determine which of the at least one cache server and node computer storing the email message and any file attachments thereto is currently online.

15. The system according to embodiments 11-14, wherein the node computers are further configured for: retrieving from at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto, having a size less than the predefined maximum size, and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; upon determining that the node computer of

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the sending user is online, retrieving from the node computer of the sending user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is not online, retrieving from the at least one online node computer of another receiving user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user.

16. The system according to embodiments 11-15, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon receipt of the email message and any file attachments thereto, sending an acknowledgement receipt message to the node computer of the sending user.

17. The system according to embodiments 11-16, wherein the node computers are further configured for automatically forwarding the email message and any file attachments thereto from a one of the cache servers to an at least one further one of the cache servers deemed to be relatively closer to the at least one node computer of the at least one receiving user.

18. The system according to embodiments 11-17, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon a one of the cache servers going offline, automatically forwarding any pending email messages and file attachments thereto stored by said cache server to an at least one other online cache server.

In closing, regarding the exemplary embodiments of the present invention as shown and described herein, it will be appreciated that a system and associated methods for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange is disclosed. Because the principles of the invention may be practiced in a number of configurations beyond those shown and described, it is to be understood that the invention is not in any way limited by the exemplary embodiments, but is generally directed to a system and associated methods for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange, and is able to take numerous forms to do so without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. Furthermore, the various features of each of the above-described embodiments may be combined in any logical manner and are intended to be included within the scope of the present invention.

Groupings of alternative embodiments, elements, or steps of the present invention are not to be construed as limitations. Each group member may be referred to and claimed individually or in any combination with other group members disclosed herein. It is anticipated that one or more members of a group may be included in, or deleted from, a group for reasons of convenience and/or patentability. When any such inclusion or deletion occurs, the specification is deemed to contain the group as modified thus fulfilling the written description of all Markush groups used in the appended claims.

Unless otherwise indicated, all numbers expressing a characteristic, item, quantity, parameter, property, term, and so forth used in the present specification and claims are to be understood as being modified in all instances by the term "about." As used herein, the term "about" means that the characteristic, item, quantity, parameter, property, or term so qualified encompasses a range of plus or minus ten percent above and below the value of the stated characteristic, item, quantity, parameter, property, or term. Accordingly, unless indicated to the contrary, the numerical parameters set forth in the specification and attached claims are approximations that may vary. At the very least, and not as an attempt to limit the application of the doctrine of equivalents to the scope of the claims, each numerical indication should at least be construed

in light of the number of reported significant digits and by applying ordinary rounding techniques. Notwithstanding that the numerical ranges and values setting forth the broad scope of the invention are approximations, the numerical ranges and values set forth in the specific examples are reported as precisely as possible. Any numerical range or value, however, inherently contains certain errors necessarily resulting from the standard deviation found in their respective testing measurements. Recitation of numerical ranges of values herein is merely intended to serve as a shorthand method of referring individually to each separate numerical value falling within the range. Unless otherwise indicated herein, each individual value of a numerical range is incorporated into the present specification as if it were individually recited herein.

The terms “a,” “an,” “the” and similar references used in the context of describing the present invention (especially in the context of the following claims) are to be construed to cover both the singular and the plural, unless otherwise indicated herein or clearly contradicted by context. Further, ordinal indicators—such as “first,” “second,” “third,” etc.—for identified elements are used to distinguish between the elements, and do not indicate or imply a required or limited number of such elements, and do not indicate a particular position or order of such elements unless otherwise specifically stated. All methods described herein can be performed in any suitable order unless otherwise indicated herein or otherwise clearly contradicted by context. The use of any and all examples, or exemplary language (e.g., “such as”) provided herein is intended merely to better illuminate the present invention and does not pose a limitation on the scope of the invention otherwise claimed. No language in the present specification should be construed as indicating any non-claimed element essential to the practice of the invention.

Specific embodiments disclosed herein may be further limited in the claims using consisting of or consisting essentially of language. When used in the claims, whether as filed or added per amendment, the transition term “consisting of” excludes any element, step, or ingredient not specified in the claims. The transition term “consisting essentially of” limits the scope of a claim to the specified materials or steps and those that do not materially affect the basic and novel characteristic(s). Embodiments of the present invention so claimed are inherently or expressly described and enabled herein.

It should be understood that the logic code, programs, modules, processes, methods, and the order in which the respective elements of each method are performed are purely exemplary. Depending on the implementation, they may be performed in any order or in parallel, unless indicated otherwise in the present disclosure. Further, the logic code is not related, or limited to any particular programming language, and may comprise one or more modules that execute on one or more processors in a distributed, non-distributed, or multiprocessing environment.

The methods as described above may be used in the fabrication of integrated circuit chips. The resulting integrated circuit chips can be distributed by the fabricator in raw wafer form (that is, as a single wafer that has multiple unpackaged chips), as a bare die, or in a packaged form. In the latter case, the chip is mounted in a single chip package (such as a plastic carrier, with leads that are affixed to a motherboard or other higher level carrier) or in a multi-chip package (such as a ceramic carrier that has either or both surface interconnections or buried interconnections). In any case, the chip is then integrated with other chips, discrete circuit elements, and/or other signal processing devices as part of either (a) an intermediate product, such as a motherboard, or (b) an end prod-

uct. The end product can be any product that includes integrated circuit chips, ranging from toys and other low-end applications to advanced computer products having a display, a keyboard or other input device, and a central processor.

While aspects of the invention have been described with reference to at least one exemplary embodiment, it is to be clearly understood by those skilled in the art that the invention is not limited thereto. Rather, the scope of the invention is to be interpreted only in conjunction with the appended claims and it is made clear, here, that the inventor(s) believe that the claimed subject matter is the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange, the method comprising the steps of:

implementing a plurality of node computers in selective communication with one another, thereby forming a network, each of said node computers configured for sending an at least one email message to a select at least one of the other node computers;

implementing an at least one cache server in selective communication with the node computers and configured for temporarily storing at least a portion of the at least one email message;

implementing an email client in memory on each node computer, said email client configured for allowing a user to draft, send and receive email messages;

implementing a local email store in memory on each node computer, said email store configured for storing email messages and any file attachments thereto;

implementing an email agent in memory on each node computer, each said email agent configured for communicating with email agents of other node computers, thereby allowing for the transmission of the email messages and any file attachments thereto directly between the email clients of two or more node computers; and

upon a sending user of a first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to an at least one receiving user of another one of the node computers:

determining whether the node computer of each of the at least one receiving user is online;

for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is online:

transmitting the email message and any file attachments thereto directly to the online node computer of said receiving user; and

upon receipt, storing the email message and any file attachments thereto in memory on the online node computer of said receiving user;

for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online:

transmitting the email message to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval;

transmitting any file attachments thereto having a size less than a predefined maximum size to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval;

storing any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size in memory on the node computer of the sending user;

upon the node computer of said receiving user subsequently going online, notifying said node computer

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of the existence and locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and retrieving from at least one of the online node computer of the sending user, the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and requiring each of the at least one receiving user to view advertising content prior to allowing access to the email message and any file attachments thereto.

2. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of: implementing an identity manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing a network address of the user of each node computer along with associated encryption keys; implementing a presence manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the online status of each node computer; implementing a delivery manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the locations of any email messages and associated file attachments thereto that are pending delivery to the node computers of one or more receiving users; and implementing a contact store in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing contact information related to each node computer and the associated users thereof.

3. The method of claim 2, further comprising the step of, upon the sending user desiring to send a email message, including any file attachments thereto, to be received by the at least one receiving user, obtaining from the identity manager an at least one encryption key associated with the network address of each of the at least one receiving user for use in encrypting the email message and any file attachments thereto.

4. The method of claim 2, further comprising the steps of, for each receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online: notifying the delivery manager of the existence and respective locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and querying the presence manager to determine which of the at least one cache server and node computer storing the email message and any file attachments thereto is currently online.

5. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of retrieving and storing the email message and any file attachments thereto further comprises the steps of: retrieving from at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto, having a size less than the predefined maximum size, and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is online, retrieving from the node computer of the sending user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is not online, retrieving from the at least one online node computer of another receiving user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined

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maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user.

6. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of, upon receipt of the email message and any file attachments thereto, sending an acknowledgement receipt message to the node computer of the sending user.

7. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of automatically forwarding the email message and any file attachments thereto from a one of the cache servers to an at least one further one of the cache servers deemed to be relatively closer to the at least one node computer of the at least one receiving user.

8. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of, upon a one of the cache servers going offline, automatically forwarding any pending email messages and file attachments thereto stored by said cache server to an at least one other online cache server.

9. The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of selecting said advertising content based on at least one of a size of said file attachments, a popularity level of said file attachments, a subject matter of said file attachments, demographic information related to the sending user, demographic information related to the at least one receiving user, an at least one expressed interest of the sending user, an at least one expressed interest of the at least one receiving user, and a number of node computers on which said file attachments are currently stored.

10. A method for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange, the method comprising the steps of: implementing a plurality of node computers in selective communication with one another, thereby forming a network, each of said node computers configured for sending an at least one email message to a select at least one of the other node computers; implementing an at least one cache server in selective communication with the node computers and configured for temporarily storing at least a portion of the at least one email message; implementing an email client in memory on each node computer, said email client configured for allowing a user to draft, send and receive email messages; implementing a local email store in memory on each node computer, said email store configured for storing email messages and any file attachments thereto; implementing an email agent in memory on each node computer, each said email agent configured for communicating with email agents of other node computers, thereby allowing for the transmission of the email messages and any file attachments thereto directly between the email clients of two or more node computers; and upon a sending user of a first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to an at least one receiving user of another one of the node computers: determining whether the node computer of each of the at least one receiving user is online; for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is online: transmitting the email message and any file attachments thereto directly to the online node computer of said receiving user; and upon receipt, storing the email message and any file attachments thereto in memory on the online node computer of said receiving user; and

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for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online:
 transmitting the email message to at least one of the at least one cache server and the-online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval;
 transmitting any file attachments thereto having a size less than a predefined maximum size to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval;
 storing any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size in memory on the node computer of the sending user;
 upon the node computer of said receiving user subsequently going online, notifying said node computer of the existence and locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto;
 retrieving from at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto, having a size less than the predefined maximum size, and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user;
 upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is online, retrieving from the node computer of the sending user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and
 upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is not online, retrieving from the at least one online node computer of another receiving user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user;
 requiring each of the at least one receiving user to view advertising content prior to allowing access to the email message and any file attachments thereto; and
 selecting said advertising content based on at least one of a size of said file attachments, a popularity level of said file attachments, a subject matter of said file attachments, demographic information related to the sending user, demographic information related to the at least one receiving user, an at least one expressed interest of the sending user, an at least one expressed interest of the at least one receiving user, and a number of node computers on which said file attachments are currently stored.

11. A system for facilitating peer-to-peer email exchange between a sending user and an at least one receiving user, the system comprising:

- a plurality of node computers in selective communication with one another, thereby forming a network, each of said node computers configured for sending an at least one email message to a select at least one of the other node computers;
- an email client in memory on each node computer, said email client configured for allowing a user to draft, send and receive email messages;
- a local email store in memory on each node computer, said email store configured for storing email messages and any file attachments thereto; and

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an email agent in memory on each node computer, each said email agent configured for communicating with email agents of other node computers, thereby allowing for the transmission of the email messages and any file attachments thereto between the email clients of two or more node computers;

wherein, upon the sending user of a first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to the at least one receiving user of another one of the node computers, said node computers are configured for:

determining whether the node computer of each of the at least one receiving user is online;

for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is online:

transmitting the email message and any file attachments thereto directly to the online node computer of said receiving user; and

upon receipt, storing the email message and any file attachments thereto in memory on the online node computer of said receiving user; and

for each of the at least one receiving user, upon determining that the node computer of said receiving user is not online:

transmitting the email message to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval;

transmitting any file attachments thereto having a size less than a predefined maximum size to at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user for later retrieval;

storing any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size in memory on the node computer of the sending user;

upon the node computer of said receiving user subsequently going online, notifying said node computer of the existence and locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and

retrieving from at least one of the online node computer of the sending user, the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and

requiring each of the at least one receiving user to view advertising content prior to allowing access to the email message and any file attachments thereto.

12. The system of claim **11**, further comprising:

an identity manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing a network address of each user of the node computers along with associated encryption keys;

a presence manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the online status of each node computer;

a delivery manager in selective communication with each node computer and configured for monitoring the locations of any email messages and associated file attachments thereto that are pending delivery to the node computers of one or more receiving users; and

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a contact store in selective communication with each node computer and configured for storing contact information related to each node computer and the associated users thereof.

13. The system of claim 12, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon the sending user of the first one of the node computers desiring to send an email message, including any file attachments thereto, to be received by the at least one receiving user of at least one of the other node computers, obtaining from the identity manager an at least one encryption key associated with the network address of each of the at least one receiving user for use in encrypting the email message and any file attachments thereto.

14. The system of claim 12, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon determining that a given node computer of a receiving user is not online:

notifying the delivery manager of the existence and respective locations of the pending email message and any file attachments thereto; and

querying the presence manager to determine which of the at least one cache server and node computer storing the email message and any file attachments thereto is currently online.

15. The system of claim 11, wherein the node computers are further configured for:

retrieving from at least one of the at least one cache server and the online node computer of at least one other receiving user the email message and any file attachments thereto, having a size less than the predefined maximum size, and storing said email message and file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user;

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upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is online, retrieving from the node computer of the sending user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user; and

upon determining that the node computer of the sending user is not online, retrieving from the at least one online node computer of another receiving user any file attachments thereto having a size greater than the predefined maximum size and storing said file attachments in memory on the node computer of said receiving user.

16. The system of claim 11, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon receipt of the email message and any file attachments thereto, sending an acknowledgment receipt message to the node computer of the sending user.

17. The system of claim 11, wherein the node computers are further configured for automatically forwarding the email message and any file attachments thereto from a one of the cache servers to an at least one further one of the cache servers deemed to be relatively closer to the at least one node computer of the at least one receiving user.

18. The system of claim 11, wherein the node computers are further configured for, upon a one of the cache servers going offline, automatically forwarding any pending email messages and file attachments thereto stored by said cache server to an at least one other online cache server.

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